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# **Organising Organic: a Foucauldian Analysis of the Regulation of Organic Food Production**

by

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## **Declaration**

This thesis is entirely the author's own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.



## Abstract

Early in the life of this thesis, Britain became the world's third largest consumer of organic produce with sales of organic food exceeding one billion pounds. Drawing on a conceptual framework based on Foucault's texts, the research investigates this little word "organic" and asks how organic food production is regulated.

The empirical study begins with a genealogy/archaeology of organic farming regulation, including very recent history in the making during the research period. Using Foucault's concepts of code- and ethics-oriented morality and focusing on self-regulation, the study considers commitment to organic farming by producers as ethical subjects. An ethnography carried out within a self-managing cooperative organic farming community shifts the research to a local level. The research investigates the various organic truths produced by individuals through subjectivisation-objectivisation interplay. The code-oriented morality of the Soil Association is an absent presence that is at variance with a looser set of values and rules associated with the self-sufficiency movement and handed down as an oral tradition. Within a heterogeneity of organic, the care of the self practice *parrhesia* is used to analyse how community members establish collective organic farming practices through decision-making practices.

The research uncovers the hidden complexities and ambiguities embedded in organic food production. The thesis reveals too how power relations are at play within the context of equality in a headless organisation. The thesis addresses the under-researched area of agriculture within business schools. Moreover, the thesis provides a comprehensive and accessible working example of Foucault's main themes and contributes to an emerging body of work based on the interplay of subjectivisation and objectivisation. Finally, the thesis contributes an empirical study of self-management to the emerging research field within Critical Management Studies of alternative organisational forms.

## Abbreviations

ACOS	Advisory Committee on Organic Standards
ADAS	Agricultural Development and Advisory Service
BDAA	Bio-Dynamic Agricultural Association
BNP	British National Party
BSE	Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy
BSI	British Standards Institute
BUF	British Union of Fascists
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CLA	Country Land & Business Association
CMS	Critical Management Studies
CSS	Countryside Stewardship Scheme
DARDNI	Department of Agriculture & Rural Development Northern Ireland
DDT	Dichloro-Diphenyl-Trichloroethane
DEPC	The Department for Environment, Planning and Countryside
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
EC	European Commission
EDC	Endocrine disrupting chemical
EEC	European Economic Community (1958-1967)
ELS	Entry Level Stewardship
ESA	Environmentally Sensitive Area

ESS	Environmental Stewardship Scheme
ETRA	Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs
EU	European Union (1993 onwards)
FARMA	National Farmers' Retail & Markets Association
FFA	Farmers For Action
FoE	Friends of the Earth
FSA	Food Standards Agency
FSE	Farm Scale Evaluation
FVP	Fruit, Vegetables, and Potatoes
GAEC	Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GM	Genetically Modified
GMHT	Genetically Modified Herbicide Tolerant
HDRA	Henry Doubleday Research Centre
IACS	Integrated Administration and Control System
IAP	IFOAM Accreditation Programme
IFOAM	International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements
IOAS	International Organic Accreditation Service
JIT	Just In Time
LFA	Less Favoured Area
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Food
MAFF	Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries



MTR	Mid Term Review
NAAS	National Agricultural Advisory Service
NFU	National Farmers Union
NR	National Reserve
OAP	Organic Action Plan
OAS	Organic Aid Scheme
OCIS	Organic Conversion Information Service (closed December 2006)
OCW	Organic Centre Wales
OELS	Organic Entry Level Scheme
OF&G	Organic Farmers and Growers
OFF	Organic Food Federation
OFS	Organic Farming Scheme
OFT	Office of Fair Trading
OGA	Organic Growers Association
PAC	Pesticides Advisory Committee
PAN AP	Pesticide Action Network Asia & The Pacific
PAN UK	Pesticide Action Network UK
PIV	Periodic Inspection Visit
POP	Persistent Organic Pollutant
PSD	Pesticides Safety Directorate
R&D	Research and Development
RLR	Rural Land Register

RPA	Rural Payments Agency
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
SA	Soil Association
SA Cert	Soil Association Certification Ltd
SDA	Severely Disadvantaged Area
SEERAD	Scottish Executive Environment & Rural Affairs Department
SFP	Single Farm Payment
TFA	Tenant Farmers Association
TIFF	Total Income from Farming
TOPP	Organic Pathfinder Programme
TQC	Total Quality Control
UK	United Kingdom
UKAS	United Kingdom Accreditation Service
UKROFS	United Kingdom Register of Organic Food Standards
US	United States
WAEC	War Agricultural Executive Committee
WTO	World Trade Organisation
WW1	World War One
WW2	World War Two
WWF	World Wildlife Fund
WWOOF	World Wide Opportunities On Organic Farms

# 1 Introduction

"2005 is the most significant year for farmers since we joined the European Community and possibly since the end of World War II."

Tim Bennett, President, National Farmers Union (NFU) (Bennett, 2005)

Situated within Organisation Studies, this thesis explores a little researched business sector, that of agriculture. More particularly, the thesis examines an upwardly mobile sub-sector within agriculture, which is that of organic food production. During the course of the research study for which this thesis is produced, the popularity of organic food consumption erupted in the UK. Moreover, the agriculture sector underwent a period of significant change with Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform, signalling the end of support payments for producing food, to which the NFU president quoted above refers.

For a number of years, agriculture in the UK has been in economic decline. Farmers are encouraged by their bank managers to become entrepreneurs and diversify into other businesses. Some have attempted to convert to organic. When incomes are negligible, land is still an asset and parts of it are sometimes sold off or rented out to make provision for wind farms, children's nurseries, horse livery stables, motorbike scrambles, and so on. One instance of this trend can be seen in the number of barn conversions for sale in the property market.

To date, agriculture and organic farming in particular have not been studied much in business schools. Organisation theory has been criticised for marginalising the rural peasantry (Burrell, 1997) and focusing instead on manufacturing and service organisations (Burrell, 1997; Egri, 1994). The aim of the doctoral research therefore is to begin to address that imbalance.

Farming is a business that confronts many of the boundaries frequently set up in Organisation Studies, for example work/home, work/leisure, manager/worker, culture/nature, and mind/body. The agriculture sector would appear to have escaped the implementation of the management tools and culture management that have been written about extensively by Organisation Studies scholars. Farming allows us to break away from the paradigm of workers exploited by managers who, in turn, are subjugated by directors whose targets they must fulfil who, in their turn, are responsible to shareholders. Nevertheless, a significant number of farms have become agricultural businesses that fulfil this model partially. However, within farming, many farmers do still work for themselves and therefore have responsibility for fulfilling the regulations required to run a business and additional legislation that governs agricultural businesses specifically.

### **The Growing Popularity of Organic Food**

Early in the life of this doctoral thesis, November 2003 to be precise, the news that Britain had become the third largest consumer of organic produce in the world, behind the United States and Germany, was publicised widely. Annual sales of organic food in 2003 had exceeded one billion pounds. Subsequent UK retail sales of organic produce in 2004 were worth an estimated £1.213 billion, representing an annual growth rate of approximately 11 per cent (Soil Association, 2005a). It was thus calculated that UK organic sales were growing at a rate of £2.3 million a week, which was a faster growth rate than sales in the non-organic grocery market (Soil Association, 2005d). During 2005, retail sales of organic products in the UK were worth £1.6 billion, an increase of 30 per cent on the previous year (Soil Association, 2006). By 2006, annual organic food and drink sales in the UK had reached almost two billion pounds whilst globally they were worth £19.3 billion (Soil Association, 2007b).



In the decade leading up to the start of the research study, organic food production in the UK expanded exponentially. Between 1993 and 2003, organic and in-conversion UK land increased 25-fold from 30 to 741 thousand hectares (DEFRA et al, 2007:103). According to the 2006 Agricultural Census (DEFRA et al, 2007:103), significant related factors to the increase of organically managed land include farmers seeking alternatives to non-organic farming in response to falling farm incomes, the EU legislation that extended to cover organic livestock production in 1999, and an increase in organic support payments.

In the last twenty years, organic food production in the UK has shifted from the marginal to the mainstream. Lawrence Woodward, director of the Elm Farm Research Centre, recalls the perception of organic agriculture prior to the early 1980s:

“Organic agriculture has in the past been treated as something of a joke in this country. Phrases like ‘muck and magic’ spring immediately to mind, closely followed by visions of bearded hippies and ‘organic communes’.” (1984:1)

Organic is now a fashionable and popular word. But how has this little word "organic" become so big of late?

### **How Did Organic Become Popular?**

The emerging popularity of organic consumption is often attributed to an increasing intensification and industrialisation of agriculture and food production during the last 50 years that has endangered human health and damaged the environment. Agricultural economic decline is also a factor in the surge in organic food production.

## The Problematisation of Food Consumption

The Curry Commission, appointed in 2001, was tasked with advising the Government on how to create a sustainable, competitive and diverse farming and food sector. In 2002, the Curry Commission reported to Government as follows: *"Consumers are uneasy and concerned about the wholesomeness and safety of the food they eat"* (Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food, 2002:14). Over the last ten years approximately, the problematisation of eating food has become a mainstream concern. Increasingly, food quality and food safety are questioned. At the same time, the impetus is to produce food as cheaply as possible <sup>1</sup>. Through mass-production, food has become heavily processed and increasingly distanced from its origins:

"Mass-produced food ... can be churned out over and over again in vast, uniform quantities, made by a handful of big manufacturers who jump to the big retailers' tune. ... Industrial food lends itself to the supermarkets' heavily centralised, highly mechanical distribution systems, but fresh raw ingredients don't." (Blythman, 2004:71)

As a result, food is cheap, or at least appears to be cheap, but the quality of the food produced has come increasingly under question. Modern production and distribution methods are criticised for rendering food flavour-less, lacking in vitamins, and laced with additives to preserve the food or to add artificial flavouring. Meanwhile, the visual appearance of fruit and vegetables is enhanced by offering consumers a uniform appearance that is devoid of blemishes. Furthermore, advice on what to eat to maintain a healthy life is widespread in the media. Television viewers are bombarded with programs that feature food and cooking.

In 2005, the celebrity chef Jamie Oliver instigated a Feed Me Better campaign, through Channel 4 TV, generating publicity about the low nutritional quality of school dinners that appeared to consist almost entirely of processed junk food such as the notorious “Turkey Twizzlers”. The campaign brought about major changes in some local councils. For example, Ashlyns Organics are working with former dinner lady and chef Jeanette Orrey, who worked on the Jamie Oliver school dinner project, to supply local organic produce to Essex schools and train catering staff through their own kitchens. Furthermore, subsequent government legislation covering school food nutritional standards in England came into force on 10 September 2007 (Statutory Instrument no. 2359, 2007).

Meanwhile, popular books to support food paranoia have proliferated, with titles such as *The Great Food Gamble* (Humphrys, 2001), *Fast Food Nation* (Schlosser, 2002), *Not on the Label: What Really Goes into the Food on Your Plate* (Lawrence, 2004), *We Want Real Food* (Harvey, 2006), *Eating: What We Eat and Why It Matters* (Singer & Mason, 2006), and so on. Moreover, the film *Super Size Me* (2005) documents Morgan Spurlock’s experiences of eating only McDonalds food for one month.

An obsession with calorie-counting and losing weight through diet has shifted to deeper concerns about whether food is detrimental to health. Clearly, the big ‘C’ word, cancer, is a factor in the growing perception that what we eat may actually be harmful. In recent years, the implications of food production for human health have been highlighted by a number of food scares, including BSE <sup>2</sup>, salmonella, pesticide residues, growth hormones, E-coli, the Sudan 1 food contaminant, and GM “Frankenstein foods”. Of these, it is the use of pesticides that organic most obviously avoids. At the time of writing, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), in their top ten website tips on reducing exposure to hazardous chemicals, recommend web



readers to buy organic produce whenever possible and to avoid the use of pesticides in the home or garden by going organic <sup>3</sup>. DEFRA has commissioned a two year research project to investigate a possible link between pesticide exposure and Parkinson's disease (Regulatory Agencies Strategy Board, 2006). Brenda Sutcliffe, a sheep farmer whose family's health was affected badly after using organophosphates, has been collecting evidence for the past 15 years in a campaign to establish links between organophosphate poisoning and ill health in farmers, soldiers and the general public (Public and Commercial Services Union website, 2007). A researcher at University College London has been awarded funding by DEFRA to study neuropsychological and psychiatric functioning among sheep dippers exposed to organophosphates (Organophosphate Information Network website, 2006).

In contrast with mass-produced food, organic on the grocery store shelf indicates a promise of good things: wholesome, healthy, pure, "green", environmentally friendly, pesticide-free, and a possible antidote to all the recent food scares.

## **The Environment**

The Curry Commission reported recently that England's farming and food industry is unsustainable environmentally. The Commission alleges that the countryside environment has been damaged by years of intensive agricultural production:

"Two-thirds of England's hedgerows were lost between the 1950s and the 1990s. Once familiar farmland wildlife has experienced serious decline... Soil organic content has declined and phosphorus levels in topsoils have increased. Agriculture is now the number one polluter of water in the country ... Beyond any doubt the main cause of this decay has been the rise of modern, often more intensive, farming techniques " (Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food, 2002:67-68).



Global warming has become a “hot” topic on an international scale. The Stern Report concluded that climate change is a serious global threat that demands an urgent global response (Stern, 2007). The report showed that, in 2002, agriculture contributed 14 per cent to greenhouse-gas emissions in the form of non-CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, which is the same percentage as that contributed by industry in the form of CO<sub>2</sub> and non-CO<sub>2</sub> emissions totalled together. Of agricultural emissions, fertilisers are the largest single source (Stern, 2007: Annex 7.g). The Stern Report forecast that emissions from agriculture would increase by one-third by 2020, commenting “*The implementation of measures to reduce agricultural emissions is difficult*” (208). Whilst not alluding to organic farming methods specifically, the report does recommend enhancing natural soil fertility to reduce the need for “*man-made fertilisers*” (545). It is claimed that organic farming, therefore, has the potential to provide a more eco-friendly form of farming that will not be as detrimental to the sustainability of the planet.

### **The State of Farming Today**

The decline in the agriculture sector has encouraged farmers to convert to organic farming. The higher premiums that organic food attracts is appealing to non-organic farmers struggling to make a living. By the beginning of the 21st century, farm incomes had reached their lowest point since the 1930s (Commission for Rural Communities, 2005:102). Additionally, English farming’s share of the national economy had declined to 0.9% (Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food, 2002:15). In the United Kingdom in 2004/05, a quarter of farms had a net farm income of less than zero and a half had an income of less than £10,000 (DEFRA et al, 2007:10). Many farmers, too, are approaching what would in most industries be considered to be retirement age: in 2003, 60 per cent of those in control of farm holdings were over the age of 55 (Commission for Rural

Communities, 2005:102). In a survey carried out by ADAS (2004), the mean age at which organic and non-organic farmers planned to retire was 76.9 overall.

During the second half of the twentieth century, agriculture in Britain and most of Western Europe became increasingly industrialised and intensified with small family farms on the decline. Until WWII, there had been about 500,000 farms in Britain, most of which were small and mixed, and used rotation to maintain soil fertility and contain pests and disease (Lawrence, 2004:138). Since then, farming has become dominated increasingly by agri-business.

### **What Does Organic Mean?**

One way of thinking about what organic means is to think of what organic is not, which is organic's "other": "conventional" farming. Organic food is often perceived as that which has NOT gone through a process that uses pesticides, genetically modified (GM) technologies, and controversial animal practices such as routine use of antibiotics, feeding growth hormones, and keeping animals in small confined spaces. Organic food production does NOT harm the environment or compromise the integrity of the soil. This concept of using the "other" to define something is quite common. For example, see the study by Barrett (1996) where the concept of masculinity in the US navy is reinforced by the other: the stereotyped feminine traits of crying and physical weakness.

Statements about what organic IS are less common. Organic farming seeks to minimise external inputs by making best use of its own resources and is practised in most countries round the world (Dabbert et al, 2004). Lobley et al (2005) argue that while many organic farmers agree about what organic farming is not, they diverge over what organic farming practices actually are. Moreover, organic farming

can by choice be incorporated within a much larger lifestyle that values a better society through a sustainable agricultural system or it may simply be restricted by an individual to following the rules of a certification scheme. Perhaps the most diverse form of organic is provided by the biodynamics who use an astronomical calendar to determine favourable times to plant, cultivate and harvest.

Since 1993, all food sold as organic is required by EU law to be produced by a certified organic producer. If the food is processed, then the process of processing must also be carried out by a certified person. Production and processing are certified separately. In the UK, organic growers and processors can choose to register with one of several certification bodies, which operate independently of the government. For example, the UK's largest certification body, the Soil Association, is a registered charity.

If organic produce is more commonly recognised by what it is not, which is the other that is conventional farming, what then does organic mean? And if organic is defined by what it is not, how can organic be regulated?

### **The Research Question**

The question put forward then is: How is organic regulated? More specifically, how is the organic producer regulated at the level of practices? Drilling down, how is the organic producer regulated: firstly, through the implementation of standards by a certifying body; secondly, and perhaps less formally, through regulation from other organic producers, supply chains and retailers; and, thirdly, through self-regulation?

The intention of the doctoral research thus is to focus on the practices associated with producing food organically and the ways in which these practices are



organised and debated. Underpinning the research is an interest in the construction of organic meaning through decisions made on how to farm and how, in turn, the construction of organic meaning impinges on organic practices. What does it mean “to be organic” and does this vary between different people? What are the truth games played in the organic discourse? How is an organic selfhood constructed?

### **Thesis Outline**

The thesis comprises eight chapters. Chapter 2 examines the role of regulation in our lives today through the lens of Organisation Studies. A particular focus is the distinction made between regulation and self-regulation when discussing the difference between bureaucratic and post-bureaucratic ways of organising. It is also found that many of the studies prioritise the social over the individual and hence might be read as leaning towards social determinism. With these limitations in mind, Chapter 3 turns to Foucault to set up a conceptual framework. Foucault’s analysis is radically different for he maintains that when one is being regulated, one responds to the rules through self-regulation. Indeed, it seems possible to use Foucault’s work to dissolve quite a few other boundaries. Moreover, a close reading of Foucault’s texts reveals them to be empowering rather than constraining for the individual, or subject. This is a very different outcome from many other borrowers of Foucault’s work who interpret him as referring to repressive forms of power such as totalitarianism and domination. It is found too that Foucault’s work focuses very much at the level of practices of truth production.

Chapter 4 sets up a methodological framework to answer the question of how is organic regulated using the conceptual framework set up in Chapter 3. Foucault’s methodological rules and principles are acknowledged as having a contributory factor to the thesis. However, they are complex; comprehensive applications of

them are few, if they exist at all. Accordingly, there is no direct attempt to implement them in this thesis, but they are considered to have an influence on the research study described in this thesis. It is also decided to carry out an ethnography, inspired in particular by Coffey (1999). This chapter also includes details of data collection and analysis.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 constitute the empirical chapters of this thesis. Through a combination of genealogy and archaeology, Chapter 5 provides a historical context to the emergence of organic food production and its regulation, including very recent history that took place during the research study. Chapters 6 and 7 analyse the production of organic in a non-commercial organic farming community. Chapter 6 investigates how organic is grounded in community members' subjectivities in different ways, thus producing a variety of truth games about organic at the community, resulting in "contradictory discourses" about organic. From what sources do community members draw their ideas of organic? How do new community members integrate their organic thoughts and practices with the rest of the community? Meanwhile, while the community is self-regulating, the Soil Association as a regulating certification body provides an ever absent presence.

Chapter 7 investigates the community further by considering regulation of each other by community members in their attempts to farm communally in the absence of one coherent discourse on organic. How do community members work together at farming organically without direct rules to follow? How do individuals cope with living with other community members who are differently organic? Accordingly, Chapter 7 analyses collective and individual self-regulation practices.

Finally, Chapter 8 pools together the findings of this research study, identifies the contribution made, and suggests some ways forward for future research.

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<sup>1</sup> Whilst food prices in England are historically low, UK taxpayers spend three billion pounds annually on agricultural support (Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food, 2002:13-14). The agriculture industry has become increasingly reliant on subsidies. In 1985, direct production subsidy accounted for 23% of family farm income on average across all farm types whereas, in 2003, this figure was 65% (Oglethorpe et al, 2005:24). In 2005, the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) publicised which farmers receive the most handouts. Between 2002 and 2004, the two largest recipients, Sir Richard Sutton and the Vestey family, received 2.2 million pounds and 1.5 million pounds in subsidy respectively (Evans and Hencke, 2005). CAP reform will, gradually over eight years, switch from paying farmers to produce food to paying them to look after the environment.

<sup>2</sup> Publicity on BSE has died down. Meanwhile, during 2004, DEFRA (2005b) reported 309 British cases.

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.wwf.org.uk/chemicals/toptips.asp>, accessed 03/09/2007.

## 2 Organisation Studies: Regulation and Self-Regulation

### Introduction

In this chapter, I consider existing Organisation Studies-oriented literature on regulation and self-regulation. I begin by referring to work carried out that identifies, in later modernity, a greater reflexivity and a perception of the risks attached to modernity. This notion of risk is responded to by attempts to institutionalise trust through regulation and an interest in self-policing. Next, I outline Weber's theory of bureaucracy as organisation by regulation. Then, I introduce post-bureaucracy and the accompanying notion of self-regulation as further trends of late modernity. Finally, I discuss the complexities stemming from the literature presented here and look to a way forward for this research study on the regulation of organic food production.

### Risk Society

In *Risk Society* (1992), Beck contends that modernity has entered a second stage that is reflexive and tries to interpret and manage the risk produced by modernity's first stage. Reflexive modernisation differs from postmodernism in confronting, rather than abandoning, scientific-instrumental modes of thought. Modernity's first phase has not been reflexive: "*Reflexivity is excluded from the social and political interactions between experts and social groups over modern risks, because of the systematic assumption of realism in science*" (4). To illustrate, Beck cites the case of farm workers complaining about herbicides damaging their health. The Pesticides Advisory Committee (PAC), tasked with investigating, was comprised largely of toxicologists who reported that there was no risk. Presented with objections by the general public and a large dossier of medical cases from farmers,



the PAC reported that according to the scientific literature there was no danger as long as farmers observed correct conditions of use. The farmers retorted that the correct conditions of use were ideological and unrelated to reality. Here, the PAC is not undergoing a reflexive learning process but, instead, referencing science as something that is real rather than a construction.

In his next thesis of reflexive modernisation, Beck (1994) alleges that, in risk society, conflict over the bad things that industrial society produces dominates over the good things that can be produced. Accompanying the shift from industrial society to risk society is a shift from politics to sub-politics, which refers to the self-organisation of the political. Accordingly, agents outside political bodies and corporate organisations appear on "*the stage of social design*" (22) including professional and occupational groups, research institutions and so on. Moreover, individuals compete with each other and with social/collective agents for power: "*Sub-politics, then, means shaping from below*" (23). Hence, in risk society, new expressways and incinerator plants etc are confronted by local protest groups. What administrators perceive as a benefit is perceived as a risk by others, producing ambiguity. There are calls for consensus and cooperation between parties with different interests. One very recent example occurring during August 2007 is the Camp for Climate Action protest that took place at Heathrow Airport. The different groups attending included Airport Watch, an umbrella organisation to which the National Trust and RSPB are affiliated, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, together with local residents. The camp ran on renewable energy and the food was mostly vegan and organic. The camp also incorporated an attempt at self-government through consensus decision-making, for which preliminary familiarisation workshops were held.



Concomitant with the growing perception of the risk attached to modernity and a loss of trust in politics is an increase in the institutionalisation of trust through regulatory mechanisms.

### **The Institutionalisation of Trust: Regulation through Audit**

Regular readings of *Farmers Weekly* reveal that farmers are obliged to comply with an array of regulations to do with waste management, movement of animals, and so on. Complaints from farmers about “red tape” and office-based “pen-pushers” are rife.

Auditing is used as a way of legitimising organisational action and making that legitimisation visible to the outside world through certification. From the late 1980s onwards, an audit explosion has occurred whereby developed societies organise trust and institutionalise checking mechanisms through the setting up of regulatory bodies that practise a mix of inspection, evaluation, and audit (Power, 1997). In the “*growing industry of comfort production*” (Power, 1997:147), financial auditing and environmental auditing in particular are instances of a massive growth in regulation. Power goes on to say that quality assurance through audit says more about the control system in place than about “substantive performance” (60). In this sense, the certification that results from the audit process might be little more than a form of impression management in that systems of control over operations become the object of audit rather than the operations themselves. In other words, audit equates to regulation of a somewhat self-regulatory process.

Using environmental auditing as an example, Power points out that the boundary between regulation and self-regulation has become blurred:

“Instead of regulation seeking to penetrate organizational culture from the outside, the image proffered is more that of a form of self-control embodied in the quality assurance system extending its visibility beyond the organization. The externalization of internal control and the internalization of external controls are no longer clearly distinguishable.” (1997:62)

Hence, organisations are obliged to comply with governmental regulations but, in doing so, there may be an element of self-regulation. Indeed, regulation and self-regulation may not disentangle easily.

### **Regulation Within Organisations: Bureaucracy**

Many organisations, and particularly large organisations, are run as bureaucracies. In developing a theory of bureaucracy, Weber ([1905]/1947) contrasts legal authority with traditional authority, associated with the church and monarchy, and charismatic authority. Legal authority is characterised by “*a consistent system of abstract rules which have normally been intentionally established*” (302) and which are used to organise the activities of those working in the bureaucracy. Anyone who is in authority occupies an office and issues commands to others subject to “*an impersonal order to which his actions are oriented*” (302). In other words, post-holders detach their personal views from the orders that they give, which in turn conform to the rules that have been established. Through compartmentalisation of work, each post-holder has a specific area of competence and is allocated only enough authority to carry out the particular tasks associated with the post. To learn how to apply the rules rationally, each person receives specialised training. A principle of hierarchy is used to organise the different offices: “*each lower office is under the control and supervision of a higher one*” (303). To diminish personal

interest, running the organisation is separated from ownership. Discussions, proposals and decision-making are recorded formally in writing.

Weber ([1905]/1947) goes on to outline how officials are appointed in a bureaucracy. The ability of candidates to carry out the duties of a post is calculated through examination and/or certificates providing evidence of appropriate training. Salaries are graded according to rank. To progress their careers within a bureaucracy, post-holders are given opportunities for promotion. Bureaucratic employees appear to be regulated rather than self-regulating: *"He is subject to strict and systematic discipline and control in the conduct of the office"* (306).

Rationality is a key feature of bureaucracy. Elsewhere, Weber ([1909-1914]/ 1968) distinguishes between acting through instrumental rationality, which is formal rationality, and acting through value-rational action, which is substantive rationality. Formal rationality is goal- and instrumentally- oriented and involves weighing up the means, the ends, and the secondary results through quantitative calculation before making a decision. Substantive rationality refers to acting according to one's convictions; that is, fulfilling the values one has through the actions one carries out. In reality, bureaucratic action involves engaging a mix of both types of rationality, although Weber advocates maximising the use of formal rationality by taking steps to ensure that officers have no personal involvement in any outcome.

Weber's conception of bureaucracy is an ideal type that, if ever fully realised, would facilitate treating everyone fairly and equally. For Bauman (1989), though, bureaucracy is less than ideal. Bauman claims that bureaucratic organising enabled the Holocaust to be engineered effectively through, firstly, distancing the means from the end through division of labour, and, secondly, substituting technical responsibility for moral responsibility. In reply, du Gay (2000) responds that for



Weber bureaucracy is inherently impersonal rather than unethical and that, on the contrary, bureaucrats possess ethical attributes including adhering strictly to procedure, withholding their own moral outlooks, and commitment to post. Du Gay claims that what occurred in Germany was a blurring of the boundary between government and politics that culminated in the Nazi Party infiltrating the bureaucratic administration of the civil service. Du Gay is critical of Bauman for maintaining a division between formal rationality, as evil and immoral, and substantive rationality as passionate and spontaneous. Like Weber, du Gay envisages the boundary as blurred.

Weber's theory of bureaucracy is oriented towards regulation by the social. The individual acts according to predetermined rules without individual discretion. Karreman & Alvesson (2004) argue that the stereotype of organisations as bureaucracies has been eroded during the last 30 years by yet another stereotype: *"that organizations are becoming increasingly network based, organic, and flexible"* (163). The next section considers attempts to break away from bureaucracy and harness individual self-regulation and subjectivity.

### **Regulation Within Organisations: Post-Bureaucracy**

During the 1980s, notions of a shift from bureaucracy to post-bureaucracy, from modernity to post-modernity, from industrial society to an advanced industrial society, and from Fordism to post-Fordism, were introduced into studies of organisations. Post-bureaucracy can be located as far back as Burns & Stalker's (1961) description of an organic organisation that promotes innovation (Garsten & Grey, 1997). Gabriel (2005) identifies the supposedly new form of organisation as providing an antidote to Weberian bureaucracy in doing away with hierarchies and so on. This new form is referred to *"as network, postmodern, post-Fordist, post-*

*bureaucratic, shamrock, etc.*" (Gabriel, 2005:13). Generally, the idea is that the new form of organising enables firms to gain flexibility in order to respond more quickly to change. To meet the challenge of differentiated consumer demand, in which mass consumption has been replaced by multiple variants of the same item, firms have gone through radical organisational change in order to "*develop new ways of working which encourage innovation, flexibility and customer responsiveness*" (Du Gay, 1992:617).

Heckscher's (1994) theory of post-bureaucracy as an ideal type differs from Weber's bureaucracy ideal type as follows. Guidelines for action are based on principles rather than rules: "*People are asked to think about the reasons for constraints on their actions, rather than rigidly following procedures*" (26). It is important to know who to go to for help; peer evaluation therefore becomes crucial, as does an ability to persuade rather than command. Boundaries are more open, allowing outsiders to come in and insiders to go out. Whereas a bureaucracy favours objectivity and equality of treatment, post-bureaucracy sets up public standards of performance against which individuals can be measured. Time frames are attached to actions and checkpoints for reviewing actions are established whereas, in a bureaucracy, actions are carried out at regular intervals such as monthly or annually. Post-bureaucracy changes the way in which power is used. Weber's legitimate authority equates to domination: "*the higher level can command without giving a justification*" says Heckscher (1994:37). In a post-bureaucracy, in contrast, consensus is acquired through dialogue rather than through following rules. Not all decisions go through consensus; individuals can make decisions based on consensually agreed principles.

One fundamental aspect of the post-bureaucratic trend is a shift away from hierarchical regulation towards self-managing teams in work organisations.

## Flexible Working Through Self-Regulating Teams

In 1988, Peter Drucker “forecast” that, in the future, command-and-control organisations would need to adopt a flatter structure to allow information to flow more freely. All employees other than support workers would work in task-focused teams comprising self-managing individuals: *“it will require greater self-discipline and even greater emphasis on individual responsibility for relationships and for communications”* (47). Sinclair (1992), however, is critical of the team ideology for downplaying the inevitable presence of power within teams.

Barker (1993) conducted an ethnographic study of an organisation that was in the process of restructuring from hierarchical bureaucracy to team-working. Barker contends that a new form of organisational control, which he refers to as concertive control, evolves from consensus and self-management. Concertive control is: *“a control more powerful, less apparent, and more difficult to resist than that of the former bureaucracy”* (408). Barker claims that when hierarchical bureaucratic control shifts to a flatter structure of self-managing teams, concertive control operates through peer surveillance. One interviewee commented to Barker that whilst hierarchy involves observation by one’s manager alone, under self-management one is under observation by the whole team. Moreover, fellow team members were less tolerant than the interviewee’s previous supervisor.

Members of self-managing teams also seem to feel obliged to work very hard since they also have responsibility. With self-managing teams, authority shifts from the bureaucratic system to the value consensus of team members and the rules system that they generate (Barker, 1993). Barker found that self-managing team members set their own work schedules. Now that the teams, rather than the managers, had responsibility for getting shipments out on time, team members regularly agreed to



working overtime. Team members negotiated working late amongst themselves and valued their commitment to delivering a quality product on time more than their individual time. Team members rewarded team-mates who conformed to the team's norms by making them feel a part of the team and a participant in the team's success (425). Team-mates with "bad attitudes" were punished by making them feel guilty and putting pressure on them to conform (425).

Others, too, provide ethnographic evidence that employees who work in self-managing teams regulate each other through peer pressure. Manufacturing firms use Just In Time (JIT) and Total Quality Control (TQC) technologies to reorganise from the functional structures of bureaucracy and scientific management into product-based horizontal teams (Sewell & Wilkinson, 1992). Sewell & Wilkinson found that collective responsibility within teams for achieving targets produces intense peer pressure, resulting in confrontations for not pulling one's weight and abundant "*opportunities for informal 'persuasion'*" (281). They maintain that the controlling function of middle management has been incorporated into the consciousness of team members (284).

Sewell (2005) observes that team pressure is "*often mobilized through team activities such as meetings, training activities or problem-solving sessions where team members are 'worked on' by their colleagues*" (211). By being perceived as a poor team member, we have not only let down our friends and colleagues but we are also estranged from our "*natural selves*" (Sewell, 2005:211).

Warhurst found that although individual workers in a self-managing kibbutz had complete autonomy and were not subject to evaluation or monitoring by their managers, they tended to extend most working days voluntarily by half an hour (1998). Warhurst noted something like the Protestant work ethic operating as a

moral code or value system of the kibbutz. Peer pressure ensured conformity to productivity norms: *“Those who did not conform to community expectations were quickly labeled and castigated”* (486).

In contrast to traditional autocratic leadership styles, team members are alleged to enjoy self-management through assuming responsibility, taking initiative, and participating in decision-making which, in turn, makes them more committed towards group decisions and keener to implement them (Sinclair, 1992:617). Inevitably, though, a double level of regulation results, for self-regulating teams not only regulate and are regulated by their peers but are also subject to the rules of the bureaucracy. Rather than supplanting regulation by enabling self-regulation, teamwork adds another layer of control. After a while, the value-based norms of self-managing teams evolve into a tighter system of objective rules (Barker, 1993), implying a move back towards bureaucratic regulation. Conversely, too, some studies have shown workers to be less self-regulating than previously due to the automation of their daily work activities (Zuboff, 1984) with IT creating more control and constraint than before (Scarborough & Corbett, 1992).

What is clear is that post-bureaucracy and “flexible working” makes people feel insecure (Garsten & Grey, 1997; Rose, 1999:156-8; Sennett, 1998).

### **Post-Bureaucracy and the Iron Cage**

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber ([1904]/1992) refers to capitalism and the pursuit of wealth it engenders as what has been translated to “an iron cage”. Now, I take Weber to mean that the continual drive of capitalism for growth and profitability would be constraining rather than empowering. Nonetheless, others have attached the concept of an iron cage to Weber's



articulation of bureaucracy rather than capitalism. Accordingly, the relationship of post-bureaucratic flexible working to the iron cage of bureaucracy has been regarded in various ways: as reinforcing the iron cage (Barker, 1993; Hodgson, 2004); as supplementing the iron cage with a mental cage (Karreman & Alvesson, 2004); and as replacing the iron cage with a glass cage (Gabriel, 2005).

Barker (1993) maintains that self-management results in Weber's iron cage being drawn more tightly than before. Similarly, Hodgson (2004) contends that, through the blending of bureaucracy with post-bureaucracy, the iron cage of bureaucracy is totalised. With Hodgson's ethnography, however, the shift is reversed. A parent company implements project management to shift a post-bureaucratic organisation, in which staff discipline themselves and enjoy a great deal of autonomy and freedom to experiment, back to a more controlled and bureaucratic one. For Hodgson, project management is essentially a bureaucratic tool through which tasks assigned to individuals are subject to intense surveillance but which draws simultaneously on the rhetoric of empowerment, autonomy and self-reliance that is a central theme of post-bureaucratic organisational discourse (2004:88).

From observations in a global consultancy firm, Karreman & Alvesson (2004) conclude that the iron cage of bureaucracy is supplemented by a mental cage of subjectivity: "*The iron cage is thus rather soft, or perhaps a mix of strict and flexible elements*" (2004:164). The mental cage makes stronger claims on peoples' subjectivities and relies on employee identification with the company; people "*tie their identities so strongly with corporate membership and career steps*" (172).

Gabriel (2005) contends that bureaucracy's rules and regulations, which formed the bars of the iron cage, have been replaced by "*an array of controls operating through language, emotion, space and exposure*" (18) that constitute something more akin

to a glass cage since they present greater ambiguity and irony. Instead of the formal rationality of the iron cage, the glass cage “*emphasizes the importance of emotional displays and appearances*” (19). Because the cage is glass, it is less obvious that it is a cage and the individuals inside are torn between maintaining exhibitionism and privacy.

An alternative view is that the iron cage has been partly supplanted by the market. In both the public and private sectors, bureaucratic regulation has been replaced by an enterprise culture through which employees are organised as customer-focused and enterprising in order to satisfy customer demand: “*market co-ordination is imposed on administrative co-ordination*” (Du Gay, 1992:619). Employees are regulated by consumers through devices such as customer surveys. Simultaneously, the enterprising employee is considered to be self-regulating, empowered and having autonomy:

“Enterprising companies ‘make meaning for people’ by encouraging them to believe that they have control over their own lives; that no matter what position they may hold within an organization their contribution is vital, not only to the success of the company but to the enterprise of their own lives.” (625)

The emergence of a discourse of entrepreneurship and an enterprise culture over the past 20 years has shifted the onus on individuals and groups to manage themselves inside and outside work. Under the guise of entrepreneurship, individuals are encouraged to acquire the skills associated with flexible working and to manage their own careers. Outside work, responsibility for security of personal and family life, such as the opportunity to opt out of SERPS, has become re-assigned largely to individuals (Grey, 1992; Rose & Miller, 1992).

A further aspect of the trend towards post-bureaucratic theorising is posited by the notion that identity and subjectivity can be harnessed to produce more controllable individuals. Studies of culture management such as that conducted by Willmott (1993) identify an organisational aim of enhancing productivity by manipulating workers into working harder through identification with the work organisation's culture: *"To win the 'hearts and minds' of employees: to define their purposes by managing what they think and feel, and not just how they behave"* (516). Masquerading under the guise of self-direction and autonomy, corporate culture management is a way of engineering employee commitment to core corporate values. In contrast with the supposed stifling of initiative of bureaucracy, a strong corporate culture is extolled as recognising the distinctive skills and contribution of individual employees (Willmott, 1993:527). Nonetheless, bureaucracy at least allows employees *"to think what they like as long as they act in a technically competent manner"* (Willmott, 1993:528 ).

The new managerial discourses regulate the employee as an identity worker through devices such as using "We" in the context of an organisation or team (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Through cultural discourse, employees are inspired to work together as one big family (Casey, 1999). In the post-bureaucratic organisation, strong social pressure on identity is maintained through long hours of intensified groupwork, reducing opportunities for out-of-work activities that would provide other sources of identity confirmation (Karreman & Alvesson, 2004).

## **Discussion**

In *Risk Society*, Beck (1992) identifies a second stage to modernity in which the developed world reflects upon the drawbacks to modernity. Two responses are firstly, the implementation of increasing regulation through legislation to try and



manage the risk and, secondly, an increasing interest from individuals in taking matters into their own hands. Clearly, environmental damage is one of the major concerns and Power (1997) pinpoints a massive increase in environmental auditing regulation. However, an ethnographical study (Fineman, 1998) finds that implementation of environmental auditing in terms of regulation or self-regulation is problematic. Environment Agency inspectors meet with resistance from industrial managers and operators responsible for controlling pollution and waste produced by their organisations. Their willingness to be coerced into carrying out preventative measures depends upon the nature of the encounter with the Environment Agency inspectors which in itself is affected by other factors. Hence, pollution and waste seemed to be controlled more by the encounter itself than by regulation through legislation or self-regulation. As Andrews (1998) contends, publicly traded business corporations in particular are under pressure from investors to focus on short-term profitability. For managers and operators in industry, though, spending time and money on implementing environmental rules within their organisations does not contribute directly to profit-making.

For organic food producers, on the other hand, regulation by an organic certification body is more clearly related to core business. In Denmark, Michelsen (2001) reports that organic standards were decided initially by the organic farming movements themselves although, more recently, *“organic farming production standards have moved between 1981 and 1999 from pure self-regulation to heavy public intervention, both in terms of defining standards and inspecting their observance”* (Michelsen, 2001:70). Nonetheless, in the UK, it is understood that the organic certification bodies do still act independently of government in ensuring that the minimum EU standards or above are maintained. The response of one Soil Association certified farmer illustrates that the certificate can provide a passport to

commercial success: *"my business is based on the fact that it is organic"*. Accordingly, that organic producer has a positive attitude towards what might be perceived as the negative aspects of certification such as increased paperwork and yearly inspection. It seems feasible, then, that organic food producers have a positive outlook towards adhering to the rules and being inspected. Moreover, the organic producer took pride in describing her/himself as "organic" as though it were an ethical principle to be followed regardless of regulation. Hence, this thesis must consider self-regulation rather than pure policing alone.

By tradition, regulation and self-regulation have been understood within Organisation Studies as two separate entities. This is perhaps a reflection of the prevailing academic distinction between the social and the individual that are generally studied separately through the academic disciplines of Sociology and Psychology. It is also found that many theoretical and empirical studies emphasise too greatly the social over the individual. Whether the individual is being regulated or is self-regulating, the analysis is often deterministic with a zero-ing of individual will. It seems to me, however, that deciding whether to follow or break the rules requires individual self-regulation on the part of the individual.

In sum, organisational literature struggles to distinguish regulation from self-regulation, resulting in employees being disempowered even when they are said to be empowered. At this point, I turn to Foucault to provide insight into how the boundary between self-regulation and regulation may be overcome.



### **3 Conceptual Framework**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter turns to Foucault for help on dissolving the boundary commonly set up between regulation and self-regulation. A conceptual framework is set up around Foucault's themes, with the intention of applying the framework to organic food production in the empirical chapters of this thesis in an attempt to answer the question "How is organic regulated?".

#### **Chapter Outline**

I start out by explaining why I am using Foucault for the conceptual framework and follow with a full discussion of Foucault and the concepts or themes he works with. I do this without reference to other writers. The aim is to try and achieve clarity and to be as true to Foucault as I can without becoming sidetracked by the numerous other writings that make use of Foucault's work. I follow with an analysis of how Foucault's themes are used by others who have also been inspired by him. This split is invaluable in allowing me to try and become close to Foucault before considering the overlays on his work made by others and also of course by myself during the process of producing this doctoral thesis<sup>1</sup>.

Accordingly, the first few sections introduce Foucault and his unique way of looking at the world. After discussing Foucault's way of doing history, a number of key themes are introduced. Because regulation is so often perceived as something imposed by the State upon the rest of us, I start by introducing Foucault's themes of power and governmentality, both of which approach regulation "from the bottom up". There follows a section outlining Foucault's very specific concept of practices

and it is claimed that practices are the key unifying element throughout Foucault's work. The next section provides a short introduction to the theme of subjectivisation-objectivisation, whereby individuals produce truth. Foucault's later work on care of the self practices is then brought into the framework. Finally, the ethical subject is regarded as an autonomous being who makes ethical decisions based on what s/he has learnt from the outside and hence blurs the boundary between regulation and self-regulation, and the social and the individual.

There then follows an exploration of the ways in which Foucault's work has been used by other researchers.

### **Why Use Foucault?**

If I do not use Foucault for analysis, what other position can I use? Positivism offers an alternative approach that embodies a belief in scientific method and utilises quantitative methods. The object is to discover truth in the form of facts and to achieve closure by "black boxing" (Latour, 1987) the discovery so that it becomes naturalised. However, it is closure that I am working against. I am looking to open out this little word "organic" and to reveal the hidden complexities behind a word that is marketed to consumers as non-problematic. In addition, I am not prepared to formulate a hypothesis before I collect the data, for a hypothesis will frame the questions I ask which I believe will compromise the integrity of the research in which it is proposed that the questions will develop from early findings and from the reading that I do. Nevertheless, one might argue that viewing organic as a complex and ambiguous word is a hypothesis in itself, although I prefer to regard it as a starting point that does not steer the research in a specific direction.

An alternative position I can use is Critical Realism. However, in that case, I will have to make judgements on what is real and what is not real which will lead me to privileging some knowledges over others. I prefer the post-structuralist viewpoint that reality is constructed, rather than something that exists in its own terms. However, neither am I keen to follow the path of the Social Constructionists who privilege the social over the individual. I prefer to think that on the whole it is individuals, rather than social groups, that do the constructing. After all, a social group is made up of individuals and there is no guarantee that their constructions are alike. I would rather align myself with the poststructuralists, who acknowledge that there are multiple realities. That is to say, within a social group in which individuals are located in a similar context, the subjective experiences of those individuals might be very different.

Of the poststructuralists, Foucault contributes to my conceptual insights greatly and Derrida perhaps to a lesser extent. Having been introduced to Foucault in the form of *Discipline and Punish* approximately twenty years ago as an undergraduate, that text has affected the way that I think about what I see around me. Moreover, by taking two modules in my final year in the Department of Philosophy at Warwick University, I deepened my understanding of Foucault and became conversant with Derrida's concepts of difference and so on. Derrida has some appeal because he is less popular than Foucault and is not used very much at all in Organisation Studies. Hence, there is less conflict over how Derrida should be used. For the purpose of writing this thesis, though, I choose Foucault over Derrida because I have an affinity with Foucault's writings, whereas at times I find Derrida's texts quite challenging. Additionally, I have used Foucault successfully in the past. Recently, I applied Foucault's thoughts in *Discipline and Punish*, *Power/Knowledge*, and governmentality (Foucault, 1991a) to the analysis of a Masters dissertation



(Skinner, 2003) and gained a Distinction. I would like to take advantage of the period of doctoral study, to extend my reading of Foucault. Nonetheless, Derrida's concepts are likely to underpin parts of the thesis.

What I like about Foucault is that he offers a flexible analytical approach. Rather than stipulating a theory, Foucault offers a toolkit for analysis. Accordingly, when I apply Foucault's analysis, I do not feel caged in. If I used a Marxist approach, I would have to explain my analysis in terms of class. Moreover, a perspective that the working classes are in some way lacking will of necessity underpin my analysis. The working classes are judged, most often through a middle class lens, to have an inferior position in the world to other social groups, which I find problematic. Foucault, on the other hand, acknowledges neither class nor gender. Since I am not studying either of these two issues specifically, I prefer to avoid using a class-based or gender-based approach.

The doctoral research asks how the organic food producer is regulated at the level of practices. Perhaps then the most important point to make regarding why I am using Foucault is for his focus on practices, whereby practices are "*understood simultaneously as modes of acting and of thinking*" (Florence, 1994: 317-318). Foucault recommends studying practices in preference to studying the subject. This recommendation resonates with what I am aiming to do, because I do not wish to treat the people who help me to collect data as subjects by extending the notion of a laboratory to the outside world.

Whilst others also base their work on practices, as shall be seen later in this chapter, what I find particularly attractive about Foucault's version of practices is that they are situated very much at the micro level. In the case of the organic food producer, such practices might include the ways in which fertilisation is achieved



and pests and weeds are controlled. However, I shall also be looking to analyse the organising practices of organic producers and at how these constitute organic subjectivity. Foucault's practices are carried out by individuals, which is what I am looking for, in preference to a social explanation. Individuals are not assigned to a social class that determines what happens to them. Rather than contending that one group of people has power over another group, Foucault assigns power to the individual and allows for the possibility of autonomous self-regulation rather than control by abstract rules.

Finally, as shall be seen in Chapter 4, Foucault provides not only a philosophical approach but also a methodology for the study. Rather than look for truth, Foucault encourages the researcher to investigate how truths are created. Foucault allows one to look for the conditions of possibility that enable people's thinking about organic to emerge and mutate, rather than expecting to find meaningful significations or an origin within an organic discourse. A conceptual framework based on Foucault allows one to ask what ever put the idea of organic into people's minds in the first place, particularly when organic farming has been practised for millenniums without being referred to as organic farming. Foucault allows me to consider what were the possibilities of a certain thing being said about organic at a certain time and to study changes in the way people orientate themselves in the way that they think about organic. By following Foucault, the notion of multiple organic discourses becomes plausible and this will make the research more interesting.

## Who is Foucault?

The conceptual framework for studying the regulation of organic in the current thesis is inspired by Foucault. This section introduces Foucault into the research study.

Foucault is, or was, a French intellectual who died in 1984 at the age of 58. Whilst Foucault and his work resist categorisation, he is commonly regarded these days as a poststructuralist. Poststructuralism, for which Jacques Derrida is another main proponent, is not a school of thought but instead comprises a set of different theoretical positions that challenge the school of structuralism which, chronologically at least, is the precursor of poststructuralism. Rather than generating knowledge by presenting a theory, poststructuralists study the production of knowledge itself. (Of course, it could be argued that the poststructuralists are producing knowledge about how knowledge is produced.) In a short work written in the style of a Philosophy encyclopaedia entry for “Foucault, Michel, 1926- “ (Florence, 1994)<sup>2</sup>, Foucault claims that he has introduced a complete break into philosophy: rather than introducing a new philosophical discourse to topple Marx and Sartre, he has instead interrogated how such discourses are established and how they have become so powerful. Hence, Foucault interrogates the way in which discourses, including discourses of philosophy, and their power are established (Florence, 1994). He refers to “*the inhibiting effect of global, totalitarian theories ... In each case, the attempt to think in terms of a totality has in fact proved a hindrance to research*” (Foucault, 1980a:80-81). Here, Foucault is not condemning global, totalitarian theories such as Marxism and psychoanalysis, for he goes on to say that such theories provide “*useful consistent tools for local research*” (1980a:81). What Foucault is doing is trying to encourage others to think “outside the box” of these meta-theories that structure

academic thinking. So, to avoid falling into the same trap, Foucault claims to put forward analyses rather than theories: "*The aim of the inquiries that will follow is to move less toward a "theory" of power than toward an "analytics" of power*" (Foucault, [1976]/1988:82).

Both Derrida and Foucault deconstruct the binary oppositions which, for them, structure rationality and logic and thereby inhabit Western thought. For Derrida, it is binary oppositions that lie at the heart of his strategy of deconstruction:

"To avoid both simply neutralizing the binary oppositions of metaphysics and simply residing within the closed field of these oppositions, thereby confirming it ... We must traverse a phase of overturning. To do justice to this necessity is to recognize that in a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of vis-à-vis, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.) or has the upper hand. To deconstruct the opposition, first of all, is to overturn the hierarchy of a given moment. To overlook this phase of overturning is to forget the conflictual and subordinating structure of opposition." (Derrida, [1972]/1982:41, emphases in original)

In his inaugural lecture, Foucault (1981) highlights the reason/madness and truth/falsehood oppositions as procedures of exclusion whereby reason/madness relegates the individual who is considered mad to having less of a voice and truth/falsehood maintains a situation whereby only speech that fits in with what is considered already to be true is listened to.

Preferring to do things in his own particular way, Foucault was reluctant to be bound intellectually to a single academic discipline. To overcome the problem of assigning him to a chair in a named discipline, the Collège de France created a new



chair for Foucault in the History of Systems of Thought. Foucault's response to an interviewer's question as to what this Chair title means is: *"I don't feel that it is necessary to know exactly what I am ... My field is the history of thought. Man is a thinking being. The way he thinks is related to society, politics, economics, and history"* (Martin, 1988:9-10). Here, Foucault is talking about his wish to transcend the limitations that might be imposed by thinking within one academic discipline or even of taking an interdisciplinary approach. At the same time, Foucault is not averse to using categories for, without these, he would not be able to develop his thinking and express his thoughts to others. To provide a framework for his thought, Foucault devises a number of his own themes including discipline, power, governmentality, practices, subjectivisation-objectivisation, care of the self, and the ethical subject. These themes are unique to Foucault in the way that he uses them, for clearly some are in general use too and have been given specific uses by other authors.

These categories will be brought into the analysis in the next few sections. For the moment, I shall compare Foucault's approach towards historical analysis with the more traditional mode of doing history.

### **Foucault's Way of Doing History**

Since the current research study takes place over a period of some four years, it should be acknowledged that history has been created during that period: firstly, around the regulation of organic; secondly, in research furthered through academic practice; thirdly through events in the researcher's life; and fourthly through happenings elsewhere where implications are less obvious. Clearly, one of the challenges of writing such a work is in encapsulating four years of history within a document that presents findings as though produced from a frozen slot within time.



Foucault tried to get round this problem by blurring the boundary between the present and the past, or the synchronic and diachronic. Saussure, linguist and founder of structuralism, introduced the notion of a distinction between looking at something at a given moment, frozen in time without reference to any historical context, which is the synchronic, and at how that something changes over time, which is the diachronic ([1907]/1996). These concepts of the synchronic and the diachronic manifest themselves in Foucault's texts, corresponding broadly to archaeology and genealogy. I shall say more about archaeology and genealogy in Chapter 4.

Having introduced Foucault into the study as a man who tried to break down existing modes of thinking in order to generate a new kind of analysis, then, this section looks more closely at Foucault's approach to studying the history of thought. Because Foucault refrains from isolating the present from the past, all of his work has a historical dimension. Foucault is critical of traditional historiography for freezing the past from the present and, in doing so, making things appear to stop before the present is reached. Foucault displaces himself from traditional historiography and presents historical analysis as a history of the present rather than a history of the past. In this way, Foucault manages to avoid cutting off both the past from the present and the present from the past.

What is particularly relevant for the purposes of this thesis regarding the stand that Foucault takes on studying the history of thought is his blurring of the boundary between the social and the individual. In an interview, Foucault contends that he is not looking at thought as purely a social activity, as studied by social historians, or as purely an individual activity, as studied by cognitive studies, but is looking somewhere in between the two (Martin, 1988:14). Here, then, is a significant indicator that Foucault is attempting to bridge the traditional breach between the

social and the individual, a theme that he returns to again and one that shall be explored in greater detail later on in this chapter.

Foucault says that “*mechanisms of power in general have never been much studied by history*” (1980b:51). Foucault is presenting a different type of history to mainstream history, which studies at the macro level those who hold power: “*anecdotal histories of kings and generals*” (Foucault, 1980b:51) and the history of economic processes and infrastructures and institutions. Instead, Foucault recommends grounding study at a localised level through approaching historical analysis ‘from the bottom up’. A ‘from the bottom up’ approach is not new, for social historians including EP Thompson (1963) have also adopted this approach. Where Foucault is radically different to the conventions of Marxism is in disrupting the notion of a structured hierarchical society in which the under-classes are imposed upon by those above.

Accordingly, the next section looks at Foucault’s analysis of power.

### **Discipline and Power**

Foucault’s concept of power holds together a number of important themes in his work and is significant for achieving an appreciation of the role of the individual in regulation.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1977) shows how a shift that took place over a period of approximately 50 years during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries culminated in the emergence of the current disciplinary episteme. For Foucault, the shift is epistemological because it changes the way people think and in what they regard to be the nature of knowledge. Foucault uncovers the

fundamental success of the disciplinary episteme as being due to two fundamental instruments to promote individualisation: normalising judgement and observation. Normalising judgement permits “*making the slightest departures from correct behaviour subject to punishment*” (Foucault, 1977:178). Observation “*enables the disciplinary power to be both absolutely indiscreet, since it is everywhere and always alert, since ... it constantly supervises the very individuals who are entrusted with the task of supervising*” (Foucault, 1977:179). Normalisation and observation combine together to culminate in the examination as a regulatory mechanism. Through a “calculated gaze”, the examination “*manifests the subjection of those who are perceived as objects and the objectification of those who are subjected*” (Foucault, 1977:184-5). At some point later on, Foucault names these dual processes as objectivisation and subjectivisation (see Florence, 1994; Foucault, 1984a). Hence, during the disciplinary episteme, through the Human Sciences experts are created who have authority to define those who lie outside a normal distribution as mad, ill, and delinquent. Those categorised as mad, ill, and delinquent are thereby deemed to require correction and re-training. Foucault views discipline as not being exerted by any particular person or persons. The disciplinary machine seems to have a momentum of its own and this has implications for an understanding of power according to Foucault.

Foucault deconstructs the power/resistance binary opposition, with its implication of proactiveness/reactiveness, which divides people into two groups, assigning to group one the proactive perpetrator of power over group two and, simultaneously, relegating group two to a position of opposition that has no power but may offer resistance to the power that is exercised by group one. He provides an example (Foucault, [1976]/1988:123) where this is not so: to begin with, new technologies of sex were applied to “*the economically privileged and politically dominant classes*”



(Foucault, [1976]/1988:120) whilst the working classes managed to avoid them for some time. This particular case shows power as exercised within the privileged classes rather than imposed by one class over another through exploitation.

In *The History of Sexuality Vol 1*, Foucault elaborates on his rejection of a “juridico-discursive” representation of power (Foucault, [1976]/1988:82-91) in which power is purely prohibitive and subjects submit passively and obediently to the exercise of power: “*a legislative power on one side, and an obedient subject on the other*” (Foucault, [1976]/1988:85). Power is not like that today, says Foucault. From the eighteenth century onwards, in the disciplinary episteme, this version of power has become permeated by new mechanisms of power “*whose operation is not ensured by right but by technique, not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control, methods that are employed on all levels and in forms that go beyond the state and its apparatus*” (Foucault, [1976]/1988:89). Therefore, to analyse power, we must break free of the sovereign representation of power:

“At bottom, despite the differences in epochs and objectives, the representation of power has remained under the spell of monarchy. In political thought and analysis, we still have not cut off the head of the king” (Foucault, [1976]/1988:88-89).

Foucault’s view is that if power’s only role was to repress, then power would be very fragile; it would be operating only in a negative way. On the contrary, power is strong because it produces effects at the level of desire and at the level of knowledge (Foucault, 1980c:59). For Foucault, power is not in the possession of certain individuals. Neither is power located in the state apparatus: “*Nothing in society will be changed if the mechanisms of power that function outside, below and alongside the State apparatuses, on a much more minute and everyday level, are*



*not also changed*" (Foucault, 1980c:60). Rather than a single totalising point of control, Foucault views power as localised through being exercised at a multiplicity of locations:

"I do not mean in any way to minimise the importance and effectiveness of State power. I simply feel that excessive insistence on its playing an exclusive role leads to the risk of overlooking all the mechanisms and effects of power which don't pass directly via the State apparatus, yet often sustain the State more effectively than its own institutions, enlarging and maximising its effectiveness." (Foucault, 1980d:72/73)

In other words, Foucault is recommending that things that are done at a micro-level might be more significant than has been considered when explaining what goes on at the macro-level.

Foucault identifies three levels to his analysis of power: states of domination; strategic relations through which games of power operate; and technologies of government (2000b:299). Firstly, and equivalent to the traditional way of viewing the exercise of power, power is immobilised rather than exercised and hence only a state of domination can operate. Secondly, at the level of strategic relations, for games of power to come into play there must be a certain degree of freedom on both sides (Foucault, 2000b:292). At this level, power is always present in human relationships because one person is trying to control the conduct of the other person: *"there is in human relationships a whole range of power relations that may come into play among individuals, within families, in pedagogical relationships, political life, and so on"* (Foucault, 2000b:283). Individuals either try to control the conduct of others strategically: *"the freer people are with respect to each other, the more they want to control each other's conduct"* (Foucault, 2000b:300); or they endeavour to avoid having their own conduct controlled. Thirdly, that is at the level

of technologies of government, one governs through governmentality, another concept unique to Foucault that can operate in itself at different levels: governing oneself through self-regulation, governing one's household, governing an institution, right up to governing whole populations.

### **Governmentality**

"Discipline was never more important or more valorized than at the moment when it became important to manage a population; the managing of a population not only concerns the collective mass of phenomena, the level of its aggregate effects, it also implies the management of population in its depths and its details." (Foucault, 1991a:102)

According to Foucault, the shift into a disciplinary episteme at the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries shadowed another transition taking place more slowly in the western world from the sixteenth century onwards, from sovereignty to governmentality. Rule by sovereignty is self-centered whereby the ruler of a territory focuses on fighting to control geographical territorial boundaries and using weapons to gain power. Rule by governmentality slowly replaces rule by sovereignty and refers to the exercise of power in the service of those being governed without using a weapon: *"In contrast to sovereignty, government has as its purpose not the act of government itself, but the welfare of the population, the improvement of its condition, the increase of its wealth, longevity, health, etc."* (Foucault, 1991a:100).

With sovereignty, a boundary is drawn between the power of the sovereign and all other forms of power. In direct contrast, governmentality operates at different levels that link up and down in a continuum. To illustrate this multiplicity of forms of governmentality, Foucault refers to the head of a family, a teacher, and the superior

of a convent (Foucault, 1991a:91). Sovereignty is exercised on a territory whereas governmentality:

“is a sort of complex composed of men and things. The things with which in this sense government is to be concerned are in fact men, but men in their relations, their links, their imbrication with those other things which are wealth, resources, means of subsistence, the territory with its specific qualities, climate, irrigation, fertility, etc.; men in their relation to that other kind of things, customs, habits, ways of acting and thinking, etc.; lastly men in their relation to that other kind of things, accidents and misfortunes such as famine, epidemics, death, etc.”  
(Foucault, 1991a:93)

Through governmentality, the “*complex composed of men and things*” referred to above is managed by those who govern in the service of those whom they govern.

Foucault refers to governmentality as “*the conduct of conduct*”. Now, the word “conduct” (*conduire*) has a double meaning: to “lead” others but also to conduct oneself (Foucault, 1982); in other words, to regulate and self-regulate. It is important to stress here, then, that, in Foucault’s concept of governmentality, managing a population is something that humans perform both over themselves and over, and on behalf of, others and hence is both regulatory and self-regulatory. To be able to govern the state, a person must first of all learn how to govern the self and the family: “*how to introduce this meticulous attention of the father towards his family into the management of the state*” (Foucault, 1991a:92). An assertion such as this echoes the care of the self practices exercised by the Ancient Greeks and Romans two thousand years ago, as referred to later on in this chapter. They believed that being able to care for the self enabled one to be able also to care for one’s household and to look after a city-state (Foucault, 2000a:95).



With the gradual transition to governmentality, the disciplinary techniques and procedures alluded to in the previous section became crucial for managing the population both collectively, that is at the level of the state, and at the micro-level. In the eighteenth century, an emerging population was problematised in both economic and political terms: "*population as wealth, population as manpower or labor capacity, population balanced between its own growth and the resources it commanded*" (Foucault, [1976]/1988:25). The population was the object that the government must observe and know "*in order to be able to govern effectively in a rational and conscious manner*" (Foucault, 1991a:100). To observe and know, governmentality uses the science of statistics and maintains databases on the population. A population can be broken down into variables: "*birth and death rates, life expectancy, fertility, state of health, frequency of illnesses, patterns of diet and habitation*" (Foucault, [1976]/1988:25) for which statistics can be collected and analysed and then action taken accordingly in order to maintain a healthy population.

One aspect of an emerging population that had to be controlled was sexual conduct:

"It was necessary to analyze the birth-rate, the age of marriage, the legitimate and illegitimate births, the precocity and frequency of sexual relations, the ways of making them fertile or sterile, the effects of unmarried life or of the prohibitions, the impact of contraceptive practices" (Foucault, [1976]/1988:26)

Information about the population's sexual conduct was collected and analysed in order to gain the ability to intervene in the interests of regulating an increasing birth-rate and maintaining sexual health in the population. With the advent of statistics collecting and analysis, record-keeping proliferated, enabling the establishment of



discourses around topics like sexuality: "*a great archive of the pleasures of sex was gradually constituted*" (Foucault, [1976]/1988:63). The confession, which for a long time before had served as a means of expressing secrets, now came to be used as a tool for collecting and analysing data through the disciplines of medicine, psychiatry and pedagogy, all of which applied a discourse of science to analyse the data: "*The confession became one of the west's most highly valued techniques for producing truth*" (Foucault, [1976]/1988:59).

Clearly, the three volumes of *History of Sexuality* are as much a history of subjectivity as they are a history of sexuality. In this six volume series, of which only the first three were published due to Foucault's premature death, Foucault traces changes in subjectivity back as far as two thousand years ago: "*changes in the way individuals were led to assign meaning and value to their conduct, their duties, their pleasures, their feelings and sensations, their dreams*" (Foucault, 1984a:4). Foucault studies how individuals recognise themselves as subjects of desire: "*What were the games of truth by which human beings came to see themselves as desiring individuals?*" (Foucault, 1984a:7). To write a history of sexuality, Foucault realised he would have to study the subject and write a history of the desiring subject as follows:

"To analyze the practices by which individuals were led to focus their attention on themselves, to decipher, recognize, and acknowledge themselves as subjects of desire, bringing into play between themselves and themselves [sic] a certain relationship that allows them to discover, in desire, the truth of their being, be it natural or fallen ... I felt obliged to study the games of truth in the relationship of self with self and the forming of oneself as a subject, taking as my domain of reference and field of investigation what might be called "the history of desiring man". (Foucault, 1984a:5-6)

Here, Foucault is talking about subjectivity as the way in which individuals examine themselves through the exercise of certain practices in order to create truths about their selves.

The next section examines Foucault's concept of practices, through which an individual constructs truths.

## **Practices**

In the last 25 years, practices have become popular as an academic topic in the social sciences (Certeau, 1984; Schatzki et al, 2001; and so on). Later on in this chapter, where I discuss the work of others who have been influenced by Foucault, I shall situate Foucault's concept of practices within these other concepts of practices. Here, though, I attempt to gain an understanding of practices from Foucault's perspective and to show that practices provide a constant theme underlying all of Foucault's work.

Quite commonly, commentators on Foucault claim that his work is divided into a series of chronological stages of intellectual effort (see, for example, Burrell, 1988; Townley, 1994). The first stage is reported as comprising the archaeology texts that focus synchronically on knowledge formation within particular epistemes: *The Order of Things*, *Madness and Civilisation*, *The Birth of the Clinic*, and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Following on, the second stage comprises the genealogy texts that take more of a diachronic perspective and examine how power is constituted through knowledge: most particularly *Discipline and Punish*, but also including *Power/Knowledge* and Foucault's chapter on governmentality (1991a). The third and final stage is made up of Foucault's later texts that look at subjectivity and the formation of the self: *History of Sexuality* and *Technologies of the Self*.

Rather than dividing his work into stages, I maintain that practices provide a pervasive constant presence throughout Foucault's work. More specifically, Foucault is concerned with those practices that enable and enact with the production of truth. It should be acknowledged too that, whilst Townley (1994) divides Foucault's work into different chronological periods, her concurrent centring on practices reveals an implicit understanding of practices as a consistent trend throughout Foucault's work (Townley, 1993; 1994; 1998). Of any of Foucault's works, his autobiography (Florence, 1994) referred to already might be said to make the strongest case for there being a clear focus on practices across the span of Foucault's intellectual career<sup>3</sup>. In this particular text, Foucault indicates that there is a unifying element throughout his work, which is his analysis of the relation between subject and truth "*or, more precisely, the study of the modes according to which the subject could be inserted as an object in truth games*" (Florence, 1994:316).

By truth games, Foucault is talking about "*the rules according to which, with respect to certain things, what a subject says stems from the question of truth and falsehood*" (Florence, 1994:315). In another place, Foucault (2000b:297) defines a truth game as "*a set of rules by which truth is produced ... a set of procedures that lead to a certain result [that] may be considered valid or invalid, winning or losing*" rather than a game that one plays for amusement. Hence, the way that we develop knowledge about ourselves through disciplines such as economics, biology and psychiatry should be analysed as truth games rather than taken at face value (Florence, 1994:17-18). Elsewhere, Foucault makes it clear that he studies the problem of truth-telling, and not the problem of truth itself (Foucault, 1983:64). This way of looking at things negates the idea of there being one truth that is identical across all space and time. Rather, one has to regard each individual as having



her/his own truth which is true because it is true to her/him, thereby acknowledging the possibility of multiple outlooks or different versions of the truth, none of which should be prioritised over the other.

“The discourses of mental illness, delinquency, or sexuality say what the subject is only within a very particular truth game; but these games do not impose themselves on the subject from the outside in accord with necessary causal or structural determinations. Instead they open up a field of experience in which subject and object alike are constituted only under certain simultaneous conditions, but in which they go on changing in relation to one another, and thus go on modifying this field of experience itself.” (Florence, 1994:317-8)

Thus, the mentally ill, delinquent, and sexually offensive do not have these labels imposed on them from outside. Individuals who are so categorised are themselves part of a truth game in which subject and object continue to shape one another within a particular field of experience in a historical context.

In order to analyse the relation between subject and truth, then, Foucault analyses the relationship between our thoughts and our practices in Western society through history (Foucault, 1988b:145-6). Where do practices come from? Here a suggestion of the social comes in. Practices are not invented by the individual but instead “*are models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group*” (Foucault, 2000b:291). Here, Foucault is suggesting that practices are something you learn from your culture, society, and social group.

Practices analysed by Foucault include clinical medicine practices (*The Birth of the Clinic*); psychiatric practices (*The History of Madness*); discursive practices (*Archaeology of Knowledge*; *The Order of Discourse*); pedagogic practices



(*Discipline and Punish*); normalisation and surveillance practices culminating in the examination (*Discipline and Punish*); care of the self practices or techniques of the self (various); sexual practices (*History of Sexuality Vol 1*); political, judiciary, or religious practices (Foucault, 2000c); police technologies (Foucault, 1988b); *parrhesiastic* practices or “free speech” (Discourse and Truth lectures); and Christian ascetic practices (various).

In his earlier work, practices constitute the subject who is placed on the outskirts of a normative distribution as insane, or ill, or delinquent or such other through psychiatric practices, clinical medicine practices and penal system practices (Florence, 1994:316):

“What I wanted to try to show was how the subject constituted itself, in one specific form or another, as a mad or a healthy subject, as a delinquent or nondelinquent subject, through certain practices that were also games of truth, practices of power, and so on.” (Foucault, 2000b:290)

In his later work, practices are connected to a care of the self. Foucault says that sexuality is a prime example of how individuals have been called upon to recognise themselves as subjects through various practices, including self-examination, spiritual exercises, avowal, and confession. And that it is through such practices that subjects apply the game of truth and falsehood to themselves. Such practices are not, however, restricted to sexuality.

Foucault does not articulate any distinction between the terms “practices”, “technologies”, “techniques”, “devices”, and “strategies” and “models”. For the sake of simplicity, I treat these terms as though they are interchangeable. For example, Foucault classifies the sciences such as economics and biology as “*very specific truth games*” related to specific techniques that human beings use to understand

*themselves*" (Foucault, 1988a:18). He then goes on to say that of these "technologies" there are four major types, including technologies of production, of sign systems, of power, and of the self:

"Technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality."  
(Foucault, 1988a:18)

Evidently, here, Foucault is aligning technologies of the self with the care of the self practices that I talk about later on in this chapter. One must assume that he oscillates between use of the two terms "technologies" and "practices". Elsewhere, Foucault defines "techniques of the self" similarly to "technologies of the self" as:

"Those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria." (Foucault, 1984a:10-11)

Technologies of the self are very much grounded at the level of the individual: *"I am more and more interested in the interaction between oneself and others and in the technologies of individual domination, the history of how an individual acts upon himself, in the technology of self"* (Foucault, 1988a:19). Techniques of the self also constitute identity; in this context, Foucault formulates a research question about the work he was doing current to his visit to the University of Vermont shortly before he died: *"How did we directly constitute our identity through some ethical techniques of the self which developed through antiquity down to now?"* (Foucault, 1988b:146).

When individuals start to identify a problem with current practices, Foucault (1983) says that they respond by setting up a new problematisation through which they can modify the practices concerned and that this is done by particular individuals rather than by a collective unconscious:

"The history of thought is the analysis of the way an unproblematic field of experience, or a set of practices which were accepted without question, which were familiar and out of discussion, becomes a problem, raises discussion and debate, incites new reactions, and induces a crisis in the previously silent behavior, habits, practices, and institutions. The history of thought, understood in this way, is the history of the way people begin to take care of something, of the way they became anxious about this or that for example, about madness, about crime, about sex, about themselves, or about truth." (Foucault, 1983:28)

In this extract, it is possible to see the potential for an analysis of how mainstream food production has become problematised during the last decade. The first chapter of this thesis identifies the discussions and debates occurring through various media.

Foucault's practices are drawn upon by a pedagogic other, who is either a self beyond the self or a self within the self, in objectivisation/subjectivisation interplays. Through studying practices, Foucault is analysing the relations between subject and object that enable and enact the construction of truth, where truth is constituted through truth games rather than there being an absolute truth. And practices embody the dual processes of subjectivisation and objectivisation.



## Subjectivisation-Objectivisation

Through practices, the dual processes of objectivisation and subjectivisation operate to construct truth. To return to the text acknowledged earlier in this thesis to be Foucault's autobiography, Foucault maintains that throughout his career his intellectual activity has been directed to a "A Critical History of Thought" where by thought he means "*the act that posits a subject and an object in their various possible relations*" (Florence, 1994:314). And to engage in a critical history of thought involves analysing the conditions under which relations between subject and object are modified (Florence, 1994:314).

Subjectivisation and objectivisation occur as dual dynamic processes, for they always happen together: "*This objectivisation and subjectivisation are not independent of one another; it is from their mutual development and their reciprocal bond that what we might call "truth games" arise*" (Florence, 1994:315). To recap, Foucault refers to studying the modes "*according to which the subject could be inserted as an object in truth games*" (Florence, 1994:316) as a unifying element in his work. Accordingly, the mode of subjectivisation refers to the process by which a subject becomes subject to a particular type of knowledge; and the mode of objectivisation refers to the process by which a subject becomes an object of knowledge (Florence, 1994:315).

In all of Foucault's work, the relationship between object and subject is pedagogic for subjectivisation-objectivisation assumes a teacher, together with a learner who is to be improved upon and corrected. In his earlier work, subject and object are different individuals. Foucault looks at disciplinary practices whereby subjectivisation-objectivisation processes produce a different object to the subject within domains of knowledge provided by the discourses of mental illness, health



and delinquency. Earlier on in this chapter, these dual processes of subjectivisation and objectivisation were recognised as operating together where subject and object are not the same individual: Domains of knowledge are provided by discourses such as those of mental illness, delinquency, or sexuality which define the subject within a particular truth game. Through subjectivisation, a disciplinary “expert” subjects her/himself to the expert knowledge produced by the disciplines and simultaneously, through objectivisation, diagnoses another as mad, ill, or delinquent. Meanwhile, the person under diagnosis, through subjectivisation, subjectivises themselves to the opinion of the other as disciplinary expert and simultaneously, through objectivisation, objectivises the other as an expert. Perhaps, then, in the case of an individual who is judged to have a “low IQ”, one should not analyse this individual in order to find out more about low IQ-ism, but should instead investigate the normalising and examining practices that situate the individual within a field in which s/he is deemed to be of low intelligence.

In Foucault’s later work, practices relate to a care of the self, whereby practices are connected to applying the truth game to oneself, where oneself is both object and subject. One governs oneself perfectly to achieve virtue using care of the self practices: *“The principal work of art which one must take care of, the main area to which one must apply aesthetic values, is oneself, one’s life, one’s existence”* (Foucault, 2000e:271). In this way, the processes of objectivisation and subjectivisation operate within a context in which object and subject are the same individual.

It will be seen in the next section how the subjectivisation-objectivisation interplay operates whereby one individual is both object and subject.

## Care of the Self

The earliest practices that Foucault identifies are those related to the principle of caring for the self in Ancient Greek and Rome two thousand years ago. In Ancient Greece and Rome, care of the self (Greek: *epimeleia*; Latin: *cura sui*) was a constant practice and a form of activity (Foucault, 2000a:95). From as far back as Socrates, individuals were taking care of themselves. By the Late Roman Empire of the fourth and fifth centuries AD, care of the self had been usurped by Christian asceticism and renouncement.

When engaging in care of the self, one looks inside for principles on how to regulate oneself, rather than looking outside to codified rules. In Ancient Greece and Rome, taking care of yourself took precedence over and was a precursor to knowledge of yourself. Foucault says that in the modern world, knowing oneself has obscured the principle of caring for oneself. This is because of, firstly, Christianity which makes us think that taking care of ourselves is immoral and, secondly, secularism through which we have come to respect external laws more than ourselves as the basis for morality.

The “care of the self” refers to a whole set of occupations (Foucault, 1984b:50-54). Foucault says that one of the biggest problems was working out how much time to devote to *epimeleia* each day. People did this in different ways. Some set aside a few moments for introspection in the morning or evening “*for examining what needs to be done, for memorizing certain useful principles, for reflecting on the day that has gone by*” (Foucault, 1984b:50). Others took time out of the day to go into a retreat “*to place the whole of one’s past life before one’s eyes, to get to know oneself ... and, by contemplating a life reduced to its essentials, to rediscover the basic principles of a rational conduct*” (Foucault, 1984b:50-1). Whatever way was

chosen, the care of the self was not a rest cure; the time spent on caring for the self *"is filled with exercises, practical tasks, various activities"* (Foucault, 1984b:51).

Taking care of oneself falls roughly into four groups (Foucault, 1984b:51). Firstly, care of the self requires caring for the body, participating in health routines, engaging in physical exertion but without over-exerting oneself. The care of the self is concerned with the body as well as the soul with the idea of medicine being able to treat the body and the soul simultaneously. There is an increased focus on the body as being fragile and vulnerable and a threat to the soul if not looked after. Diseases of the soul are perceived as a threat for, being less perceptible than disorders of the body, they may exist unnoticed. Secondly, care of the self includes meditating, reading, making notes on books read or conversations heard, re-reading notes, recollecting truths that one knows already, and adapting them to one's life. Thirdly, one engages in talks with a confidant, with friends and with a mentor. Fourthly, care of the self can entail writing correspondence in which you reveal the state of your soul, ask for advice and provide advice to someone else who needs advice.

Caring for the self allows one to achieve a mastery over oneself. And by caring for the self, one is able also to care for others in the community: *"it is the power over oneself that thus regulates one's power over others"* (Foucault, 2000b:288). As long as you take proper care of yourself, you cannot abuse your power over others:

"When the philosophers and moralists will recommend care of oneself ... they are not advising simply to pay attention to oneself, to avoid mistakes or dangers or to stay out of harm's way; they are referring to a whole domain of complex and regulated activities. We may say that in all of ancient philosophy the care of the self



was considered as both a duty and a technique, a basic obligation and a set of carefully worked-out procedures.” (Foucault, 2000a:95)

Caring for the self, then, enables one to care for or look after others and other things, which is a notion referred to earlier in this chapter regarding Foucault's concept of governmentality. Foucault cites Plato's *Alcibiades I*, in which a concern for the self involves the activity of making efforts with one's holdings and one's health; Plato makes particular reference to the farming activity of looking after fields and cattle (Foucault, 1988a:25). Foucault shows how Xenophon uses the word *epimeleia* to designate the work of the master of the household in supervising the farming (Foucault, 2000a:95). In this example from Xenophon, care of the self is extended from looking after oneself to looking after a household or a city-state. Socrates too taught people how to occupy themselves with the city by teaching them to occupy themselves with themselves (Foucault, 1988a:20).

The common goal of care of the self practices is to achieve an “ethics of control” and a conversion of the self, which is the point where the soul becomes unassailable because it is independent and free from enslavement. It is the state of having an independent self where nothing can disturb the relationship between you and your self. During these activities, one keeps in the top of one's mind “*that the chief objective one should set for oneself is to be sought within oneself, in the relation of oneself to oneself*” (Foucault:1984b:64-5). One is answerable only to oneself: “*one exercises over oneself an authority that nothing limits or threatens*” (Foucault:1984b:65). Hence, independent thinking is one outcome of achieving a conversion of the self. A second outcome is that one pleases oneself and this pleasure is all under one's control because it does not come from anything outside one's self: “*The individual who has finally succeeded in gaining access to himself is,*



*for himself, an object of pleasure*" (Foucault:1984b:66). In a sense, one is regulating one's own pleasure.

Caring for the self became a philosophical activity, although it had not started out as such, and thereby became more generalised. Foucault suggests that Plato's *Alcibiades* shows that the later Socrates starts to use care of the self in a different way by placing the theme of the care of oneself at the centre of the *technē tou biou*. Foucault translates the *technē tou biou* as the art of existence or art of living. In *Care of the Self* (1984b:43-45), Foucault charts the gradual development of the art of living under the theme of the care of oneself:

"It [*care of oneself*] also took the form of an attitude, a mode of behavior; it became instilled in ways of living; it evolved into procedures, practices, and formulas that people reflected on, developed, perfected, and taught. It thus came to constitute a social practice, giving rise to relationships between individuals, to exchanges and communications, and at times even to institutions. And it gave rise, finally, to a certain mode of knowledge and to the elaboration of a science." (Foucault, 1984b:45)

During the first two centuries AD, the care of the self evolved gradually into the cultivation of the self, which is the culmination of caring for oneself. Foucault talks about the cultivation of the self as taking place just before the beginning of Christianity (Foucault, 1984b; Foucault, 2000d). A cultivation of the self is characterised by an individualism in which the relationship with oneself is intensified and "*in which one is called upon to take oneself as an object of knowledge and a field of action, so as to transform, correct, and purify oneself, and find salvation*" (Foucault, 1984b:42). As with care of the self, the cultivation of the self is related to the *technē tou biou* and is dominated by the principle of taking care of oneself.

Foucault points out that at the time when the care of the self evolved into the cultivation of the self, philosophers became concerned about sexual austerity. Concerns about sexual austerity were not alleviated through responding to codified laws but in taking responsibility for oneself through “*an intensification of the relation to oneself by which one constituted oneself as the subject of one’s acts*” (Foucault, 1984b:41). At the same time, there was a growth in individuality that was congruent with individuals being more interested in themselves and attaching more importance to the values of personal conduct. Individuals became detached from their traditional affiliations (Foucault, 1984b:41). A weakening of the social framework occurred as individuals moved away from the cities and became more isolated and therefore more reliant on themselves. The development of the cultivation of the self produced modifications related to the formation of an ethical subjectivity rather than a strengthening of mechanisms to thwart desire and represents a shift in the traditional ethics of self-mastery.

Through care of the self practices, one forms oneself as an ethical subject. Taking care of the self is also associated with knowing oneself.

“Taking care of oneself requires knowing [connaître] oneself. Care of the self is, of course, knowledge [connaissance] of the self ... but also knowledge of a number of rules of acceptable conduct or of principles that are both truths and prescriptions. To take care of the self is to equip oneself with these truths: this is where ethics is linked to the game of truth.” (Foucault, 2000b:285)

What is at stake in all of the care of the self exercises is the relation of self to truth, unlike the later Christian practice of excavating some secret or other from one’s soul:

"What we have to underline here is this: if the truth of the self in these exercises is nothing other than the relation of the self to truth, then this truth is not purely theoretical. The truth of the self involves, on the one hand, a set of rational principles which are grounded in general statements about the world, human life, necessity, happiness, freedom, and so on, and, on the other hand, practical rules for behavior. And the question which is raised in these different exercises is oriented towards the following problem: Are we familiar enough with these rational principles? Are they sufficiently well-established in our minds to become practical rules for our everyday behavior? And the problem of memory is at the heart of these techniques, but in the form of an attempt to remind ourselves of what we have done, thought, or felt so that we may reactivate our rational principles, thus making them as permanent and as effective as possible in our life." (Foucault, 1983:64)

Here, Foucault is moving care of the self practices towards an ethics of the self, whereby one keeps in one's mind a set of rational principles that are grounded in the social and from which one creates practical rules that can be used to examine one's own behaviour.

### **An Ethics of the Self: Foucault's Ethical Subject**

*ēthos* is a word used in Ancient Greece, notably by Aristotle, with a very specific meaning, largely lost in modern times:

"ēthos was a way of being and of behavior. It was a mode of being for the subject, along with a certain way of acting, a way visible to others. A person's ethos was evident in his clothing, appearance, gait, in the calm with which he responded to every event, and so on." (Foucault, 2000b:286)

In modern Greece, *ēthos* has been superseded- by another word with the same root, *ēthikos*, meaning 'theory of living' and from which the modern English word



'ethics' is derived. Foucault defines ethics as "the practice of freedom" (Foucault, 2000b:284). For the Ancient Greeks, ethics had the potential to be liberating: in possessing a certain *ēthos*, you were practising freedom in a certain way. And for this freedom to take shape in an exemplary self, necessitated hard work by the self on the self. Being ethical required not being a slave to oneself and one's appetites or to anyone else.

In modernity, meta-theories on ethics embrace the social as providing imperatives for the way that individuals should act and, furthermore, assign a somewhat passive role to the individual. Hence, utilitarianism, which is a theory of ethics espoused by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill amongst others, views the correct way to proceed as the one that produces the greatest good for the greatest number of people, even if some individuals are harmed by the action. In contrast, Kant's "Categorical Imperatives" are ends in themselves, for they are moral laws based on rationality and capable of being universalised; they are considered to be so fundamental that they have no ambiguity and are carried out without space for negotiation and without any thought to the possible consequences. Meanwhile, Humanism embraces the notion of the goodness of human nature: that people share universal human qualities, which enable them to determine right and wrong ways to act.

Foucault is sceptical of relying too much on universal ethical rules and principles. The following quote provides another instance of Foucault speaking out about the determinism of relying too much on the social: "*What I am afraid of about humanism is that it presents a certain form of our ethics as a universal model for any kind of freedom*" (Martin, 1988:15). His argument is against the idea of individuals responding passively to a socially-agreed dogma about the correct way to behave. Foucault's way of doing ethics is quite different from these meta-theories for



Foucault thinks that ethics is produced from the interplay of the social and individual. In this respect, Foucault's role is one of emancipation and empowerment:

"My role – and that is too emphatic a word – is to show people that they are much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes which have been built up at a certain moment during history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticized and destroyed. To change something in the minds of people – that's the role of an intellectual." (Martin, 1988:10)

In the mission statement above, Foucault is stating a wish to try and overcome social determinism by showing people that they do have choices. Hence, he views ethics as something that is done very much at the level of the individual: "ethical work" is something *"that one performs on oneself, not only to bring one's conduct into compliance with a given rule, but to attempt to transform oneself into the ethical subject of one's behavior"* (Foucault, 1984:27). Foucault is going beyond the concept of agency for, by "ethical subject", he refers to the individual as being subject to external moral prescriptions but also as being subject to her/his own actions, that is being subject to the manner in which s/he conducts her/himself (Foucault, 1984:26). Hence, a person might elect to refrain from adultery because a moral prescription, say "Thou shall not commit adultery" from the Ten Commandments, rules that adultery is an unacceptable way to act for the social group to which s/he belongs. Alternatively, as an ethical subject, s/he might choose not to engage in an adulterous relationship as a result of judging for her/his self that that would be an inappropriate way to behave. Similarly, for the purposes of the research outlined in this thesis, the assumption was made that organic food production can be carried out by farming to organic standards as a means to an end in order to gain certification and make a living, but that it might also involve

being motivated beyond instrumentality through engagement with farming in that way.

What Foucault is saying, is that a moral act cannot be reducible to an act of conformance to a rule; moral action has to take account of the context and of the relationship one has with oneself (Foucault, 1984a:28). Hence, the process of forming oneself as an ethical subject is:

“A process in which the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to the precept he will follow, and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal. And this requires him to act upon himself, to monitor, test, improve, and transform himself. There is no specific moral action that does not refer to a unified moral conduct; no moral conduct that does not call for the forming of oneself as an ethical subject; and no forming of the ethical subject without “modes of subjectivation” and an “ascetics” or “practices of the self” that support them. Moral action is indissociable from these forms of self-activity.” (Foucault, 1984a:28)

Here, Foucault is very clear in stating that although moral actions refer to social practice, they mainly rely on an individual assessing her/himself in relation to her/his actions. There is also an implicit reference to the processes of objectivisation and subjectivisation referred to earlier. In forming part of her/himself as the “*object of his moral practice*”, the subject is treating her/himself simultaneously as object and as subject <sup>4</sup>. Subjectivisation occurs through the subject locating her/himself within a field of universal moral conduct, as a subject of that moral conduct, whilst objectivisation occurs concurrently through assessing one's performance as an ethical subject in the light of one's actions through “*self-reflection, self-knowledge, self-examination ... for the transformations that one seeks to accomplish with oneself as object*” (Foucault, 1984a:29).

Foucault distinguishes between morality and ethics as follows. Morality, on the one hand, is "*a set of values and rules of action that are recommended to individuals through the intermediary of various prescriptive agencies such as the family..., educational institutions, churches, and so forth*" (Foucault, 1984a:25). There are two ways of propagating morality. Firstly, values and rules can be set down formally and systematically in doctrine and through pedagogy. For the current research, then, this might equate to the organic standards provided through regulation by the certifying bodies. Secondly, where dissemination of values and rules is less formal, regulation becomes multifaceted. This looser dissemination of rules and values might correspond to the development of organic practices that have spread out less formally through an oral tradition, in particular prior to the development of organic standards. At the very least, it might help to explain any ambiguities and incoherencies found within an organic discourse and within the organic tradition.

Ethics, on the other hand, is always an ethics of the self and equates to regulating one's own conduct, recognising oneself as the subject of one's own actions, and employing a form of governmentality over oneself through self-regulation. In so doing, individuals apply the truth game. Additionally, in implementing a code of practice, such as organic standards, individuals make ethical choices about how they comply, obey or resist, and respect or disregard these rules and values (Foucault, 1984a:25).

At first perusal, Foucault seems to be assigning morality to the level of the social and ethics to the level of the individual. However, the distinction starts to blur as Foucault goes on to differentiate between a code-oriented and an ethics-oriented morality. In a code-oriented morality, the subject is given rules or interdictions to follow: subjectivisation occurs in a quasi-juridical form, in which "*the ethical subject refers his conduct to a law, or set of laws, to which he must submit at the risk of*



*committing offences that may make him liable to punishment*" (Foucault, 1984a:29-30). At this level of self-regulation, then, the individual can choose to obey codified laws in order to escape punishment, but has other choices as well. In implementing the code, one is forming oneself as an ethical subject. Instead of seeing the subject as a passive being regulated by a set of rules, Foucault is focusing on how the subject responds actively to rules through self-regulating: *"the way in which the individual establishes his relation to the rule and recognizes himself as obliged to put it into practice"* (1984a:27). This type of self-regulation might be related to producing to organic standards in order to obtain certification. Self-regulation comes into play with regulation in a code-oriented morality when individuals make choices about how they comply, obey or resist these directives.

Now, an ethics-oriented morality, which is different from the code-oriented morality just described, is more about the individual performing certain practices in a process of self-formation as an ethical subject. Exact observance of a code is less important than the relationship the individual has with her/himself: *"in his different actions, thoughts, and feelings as he endeavors to form himself as an ethical subject"* (Foucault, 1984a:30). In organic farming, this might allow for producers who are committed to farming organically and who regulate themselves through practices according to a meaning of organic defined by themselves. With an ethics-oriented morality, *"the emphasis is on the forms of relations with the self, on the methods and techniques by which he works them out, on the exercises by which he makes of himself an object to be known, and on the practices that enable him to transform his own mode of being"* (Foucault, 1984a:30). We might relate the producing of organic food in such a way to farming organically because that is the way that the producer thinks is a fit way to farm, using knowledge transmitted in non-codified ways such as orally from one generation to another. One can practice



such a tradition because one *“regards oneself as an heir to a spiritual tradition that one has the responsibility of maintaining or reviving”* (Foucault, 1984a:27). In this frame of mind, one farms organically because one has an inherent desire to farm organically.

Foucault goes on to say that, within a given historical context, either a code-oriented morality or an ethics-oriented morality will be more dominant. Nevertheless, the prevalence of one mode does not prevent the operation of the other. Accordingly, he pinpoints the Christian tradition from the beginning of the early 13<sup>th</sup> century to the commencement of the Reformation as focusing more on a code-oriented morality through the organisation of the penitential system. In contrast, two thousand years ago, the Ancient Greeks and Romans were more oriented towards an ethics-oriented morality.

In the Greco-Roman world, the care of the self as an ethics reflected individual freedom. An individual made ethical decisions by discovering rules through examining her/his soul in divine contemplation: *“In this divine contemplation, the soul will be able to discover rules to serve as a basis for just behavior and political action”* (Foucault, 1988a:25). However, with the advent of Christianity, being concerned with oneself was denounced as a form of self-love (Foucault, 2000b:284). The Greeks and Romans relied on the care of the self practices outlined in this section for correct conduct and the practice of individual freedom. The idea behind Christianity was to attain salvation through renunciation of the self, which was also a care of the self practice but in a different form (Foucault, 2000b:285).

Self-regulation, then, equates to regulating one's own conduct, recognising oneself as the subject of one's own actions, and employing a form of governmentality over

oneself. The conceptual framework for this thesis is almost complete. Before examining how others have used Foucault's concepts, I engage in a few words of critique of Foucault.

### **A Short Critique**

This section looks for flaws in the conceptual framework outlined above.

The main point of departure is that care of the self, as practised in Ancient Greece and Rome, intensifies rather than weakens binary positions between free and unfree, autonomous individual and slave, and man and woman. Care of the self is a gendered occupation restricted to socially privileged males. Whilst the first two centuries AD were a "*golden age in the cultivation of the self*", Foucault remarks that this golden age was restricted to social groups, who were bearers of a culture, and to individuals, for whom *technē tou biou* could have a meaning and a reality (1984b:45). Foucault is idealising this period of care of the self for the freedom and autonomy enjoyed by individuals in implementing ethics in the way that they consider to be correct. Yet, caring for the self was a privilege that was not to be enjoyed either by women, or by men belonging to the wrong social group, and certainly not by slaves. Moreover, when talking about governmentality, Foucault does not question the patriarchal obligations of the head of the household who is assumed to be male and who must extend "his" skills at governmentality from governing "his" family to governing the state. Like a slave, the woman is always governed by the man in a household.

I have some difficulty in equating care of the self with an ethics of the self. The authors of the texts that Foucault uses themselves had slaves. Indeed, Plutarch was accustomed to sitting in front of a table of succulent dishes, which he then

abandoned without imbibing, leaving this food to the servants as a means of testing himself through a care of the self practice (1984b:58-64). It is a dubious claim that Foucault (2000b:284) makes in maintaining that a slave can have no ethics because a slave is not free, for Foucault is denying slaves the capability of individual self-regulation within a context of complete domination <sup>5</sup>. One could counter this statement by arguing that the body can be made a slave but the mind cannot be dominated completely. Or even if the mind is dominated by another through brainwashing, it is impossible to examine someone's mind and prove this claim. Thus, nobody can make your mind a slave totally. Foucault provides an example of a state of complete domination through the circumstance of being thrown into a deep hole. His argument is potentially flawed because the mind can still think even whilst the body is trapped: if an animal is thrown into the same hole as you, you have the potential ethical decision to make of whether or not to kill and eat that animal. You are still free for contemplation and able to draw on an ethics of the self to work out how your actions over the previous days have had an effect on others. Furthermore, McNay (1994) is highly critical of Foucault for not questioning the way that the theme of ethics of the self involves privileging the relation with the self over one's relation with others: *"The role of the other is reduced to that of passive receptacle or inert content. The interests of the other are secondary and derivative to the self"* (152). This is a valid point: in evaluating one's acts over the past 24 hours, through the care of the self practice of self-examination, it is the self that decides how one has treated others. One could argue that a less self-absorbed approach would be to ask the others with whom one has had contact how they think one has treated them.

Furthermore, there is a lack of precision in Foucault's work that might lead some to say that he is obscure. I prefer to think that he is avoiding laying down clear



unambiguous statements that tend to cut out everything else that might be possible. Foucault wishes to avoid being pinned down; he defies categorisation. There are also problems of obscurity arising from translation for those who do not read Foucault's original French texts. A substantial part of Foucault's texts is recorded as speech, rather than carefully thought-out text, although this is not to say that he has not thought carefully about what he says. Correspondingly, I posit that the benefit of reading Foucault's work, both spoken and written, is to break us out of our normal ways of thinking and he takes great care in doing so without simply incarcerating us in another bounded way of thinking from which it is hard to escape. Foucault wishes to disrupt what we think we know. I have found some supporting evidence from another author (Barratt, 2002) who contends that many critical readings of Foucault and Foucauldianism are overly generalised:

"Part of what is lost ... is a recognition of the way in which Foucault's project is marked by the continuous modification of existing positions, with the effect that many gaps and silences in his arguments are subject to subsequent development and modification. Such an approach should not be interpreted as being indicative of intellectual weakness, but rather as being emblematic of a continuous process of self-criticism which Foucault saw as an integral feature of his scholarly ethos." (194)

In this passage, Barratt appears to allude to the synchronic-diachronic nature of history and the difficulties in pinning down what Foucault says into one frozen moment. Elsewhere, Barratt says: "*Part of what Foucault offers us is a style of practising intellectual work, a possible way out from the conventional terms of reference of scholarly debate – academic polemic*" (2003a:1084). Therefore, perhaps, as scholars trying to apply Foucault's concepts, we should engage in the independent thinking that is characteristic of care of the self in responding to Foucault's texts.



Correspondingly, it is accepted that there are different ways of interpreting Foucault's work. At the same time, it is possible to misread his work through unfamiliarity or an insufficient understanding. The remainder of this chapter is therefore dedicated to assessing the ways in which Foucault's texts have been applied. The intention is to constrain criticism to those publications that contradict Foucault's analysis.

### **Commentaries on Foucault**

So far, this chapter has outlined a conceptual framework based on Foucault's texts. This section is an attempt to gain insight into how Foucault's work has been applied within the broad area of Organisation Studies.

### **Power and the Panopticon**

An abundance of research on studying organisations and organising processes cites Foucault as part of or all of its theoretical underpinnings. Much of this material draws on Foucault solely from *Discipline and Punish* with a particular focus on the Panopticon that was provided originally by Jeremy Bentham as an ideal prison architecture. Perhaps understandably, there is a tendency to interpret the Panopticon as a model of repression with its ramifications for surveillance and hence control in the workplace (see amongst others Barker, 1993; Boyne, 2000; Hopper & Macintosh, 1998; Jackson et al, 2006; Sewell, 1998; Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992). Hence:

“On this reading, we inhabit a prison like world in which our activity and time are increasingly regulated, subject to intrusive and detailed surveillance in ways that can induce insidious forms of self-discipline” (Barratt, 2003b:194).

Accordingly, Sewell and Wilkinson (1992) argue that electronic surveillance systems developed using computer technology are an improvement on those used in traditional bureaucracy in that they permit high visibility, thereby allowing management to pinpoint more easily who is responsible for the defects that can be traced back to individual operators. In Panopticon style, the potential for constant scrutiny coerces employees into managing themselves. Accounts such as these present an over-simplistic representation of the Panopticon and fail to allow for the possibility of vertical reciprocity in that those watching are under surveillance themselves by those lower down in the hierarchy. Sewell and Wilkinson (1992) do not account for surveillance's twin in disciplinary power, which is normalisation, without which surveillance cannot operate.

By focusing on a social analysis, such accounts might be accused of social determinism in assigning the working lives of individuals to specific groups, often managers and workers, with little scope for individual difference. Moreover, intimating that new technologies are capable of exerting controls from which there is no escape, resonates with technological determinism. Hence, sociological accounts based on the Panopticon are found to be overly deterministic: "*Foucault ... is often transformed to an impoverished deterministic version of his former self*" (Knights, 2002:581). One can argue that such accounts have failed to "*cut off the head of the king*" (Foucault, [1976]/1988:88-89).

There are academic studies that refute the idea of aligning working life with passive occupation inside a prison. In a Foucauldian analysis of Scottish call centres that integrate telephone and VDU technologies, Taylor & Bain (1999) conclude that call centre operators participated actively in the production process. In positing that the Panopticon only partly explains the notion of a self-disciplined workforce, Grey (1994) also provides a less deterministic approach. Grey goes on to nominate other

factors including the willingness of trainee accountants to participate in self-discipline in order to progress their careers, to invest meaning in the tedious tasks that they have to perform in order to have a career in a large accounting firm, and to view the annual cull in a positive light. In such a scenario, it is career itself that is functioning as a discipline; employees are self-regulating their working lives and organising their social lives in ways that are likely to be favourable to their careers. Unlike many of the Panopticon studies, Grey's paper credits the individual with choice and with self-regulating the self through a desire to have a career, rather than self-regulating according to desires implanted in the self by others.

Furthermore, Hoskin & Macve (1988) suggest that the Panopticon is grammatocentric rather than architectural and has the role of producing a population of calculable persons through enabling 24/7 surveillance via the secondary practices of writing, recording and evaluating. In a grammatocentric panopticon, information is collected locally through surveillance and normalisation, written down, and transferred to records held centrally. Hence, a grammatocentric panopticon enables secondary surveillance to be carried out from a distance. Since surveillance is carried out remotely, written records enable "action at a distance" (Latour, 1987). Those inspected through remote records have no knowledge of when they are inspected and are not present to interact with the inspector and present a case of defence if necessary. Furthermore, information to be kept remotely is recorded on a form through a process of organising in which the secondary practices of writing, examining, and grading are at work in organising various selves: the design of the form itself which is fundamental to future writings and readings in terms of presences and absences or silences; entering information onto the form; and any amount of readings and interpretations that follow (Hoskin & McLean, 1998). A grammatocentric model is used by Grey (1992) to refer to the



existence of retrievable records on life assurance officers gathered during Periodic Inspection Visits by the regulating body, LAUTRO, and retrievable for inspection at any time. Meanwhile, Skinner (2003) identifies the potential of normalising records held on farms over five acres by the National Farm Survey for use in deciding which farmers to put under supervision orders under the legislation of the 1947 Agriculture Act.

### **Studies on Governmentality**

Miller & O'Leary analyse the emergence of standard costing practices during the early twentieth century as enabling employees to become constructed as governable persons by allowing waste and efficiency to be traced back to the individual (1987). Standard costing is a practice that *"is a form of power in which the individual becomes an auto-regulated entity"* (Miller & O'Leary, 243). Miller & O'Leary assert that, in the second half of the twentieth century when an interest in human relations within organisations emerges, individuals come to be recognised as decision-makers who have choices. At the same time, they maintain that individual choice and freedom are something to be supervised and subverted by management. In similar fashion, Dean sets up a binary division between *"those who exercise authority – and those who are to be governed"* (1999:32). Both these accounts run counter to Foucault's concept of power as not being in the possession of a particular group of people.

Drawing upon Foucault, Miller & Rose (1990) claim that it is technologies rather than the state that *"increasingly seek to act upon and instrumentalize the self-regulating propensities of individuals in order to ally them with socio-political objectives"* (28). Miller & Rose align the shaping of individual activity and subjectivity by authorities with Foucault's concept of governmentality, but their top-



down approach and implication that the social is controlling the individual do not sit comfortably with the conceptual framework of this thesis. From the mid 1970s onwards, comment Rose & Miller (1992), regulation has been replaced by economic entrepreneurship whereby "*individuals are encouraged to strive to optimise their own quality of life and that of their families*" (198). However, whilst individuals have the autonomy to pursue their choices and maximise the quality of their lives, "*individuals can be governed through their freedom to choose*" (201). Furthermore, Rose (1990) contends that psychological expertise developed since World War 2 promised to reshape subjectivity by offering advice on such matters as career promotion as a means of "*realigning what we are with what we want to be*" (xiii). Again, this seems excessively deterministic for Rose is not allowing for individual choice and self-regulation: for example, on what aspects of her/himself to improve and how much time to spend on the task.

Associated with the 'Third Way' reform of the Welfare State, promoted recently in the UK by Tony Blair and Jack Straw, Rose (2000) identifies a recent shift in governmentality to ethopolitics, whereby regulatory practices are implemented at the level of the community rather than that of the state: "*The shift is from compliance with an externally imposed code of conduct and values in the name of the collective good to the active and detailed shaping by individuals of their daily lives in the name of their own pleasures, contentments, or fulfilments*" (1402). Here, Rose is identifying a change that, in Foucault's terms, might be analysed as a shift from a code-oriented morality to an ethics-oriented morality. However, unlike Foucault, Rose assumes that being regulated by an external code allows no option other than compliance. Ethopolitics operates by implementing programmes such as child area curfews (UK) and welfare-to-work programs (US) <sup>6</sup>. Hence, ethopolitics "*actually seeks to inscribe the norms of self-control more deeply into the soul of*

*each citizen than is thought possible through either disciplinary technologies such as mass schooling or through social technologies such as those of welfare states*" (2000:1409). But here there is a discrepancy because Foucault is saying that via an ethics-oriented morality the individual makes choices, whereas Rose is implying that certain norms of self-control decided by others are implanted in individuals. Such analysis is overly repressive for this thesis and counter to Foucault's analysis of power.

Overall, the studies referred to in this section fail to resonate with Foucault's original theme of governmentality. In so doing, they undermine self-regulation. ten Bos (1997) is attuned to the subtleties of Foucault's thoughts on rule-following:

"Foucault (1982:33), for example, understood perfectly well the moral relevance of ethical rules. He makes a useful distinction between 'l'agent moral' who does exactly what the ethical code prescribes and 'le sujet moral' who chooses a particular attitude with respect to this code." (1012) <sup>7</sup>

ten Bos goes on to say that nobody does exactly what the rules say for often rules are ambiguous and hence there is room left for choice: *"We can only be moral subjects because we always choose how we subject ourselves to a particular rule ('le mode de l'assujettissement'). This choice constitutes our very own morality"* (ten Bos, 1997:1012, emphasis in original). His view is that, whilst managements will try and restrain the freedom of individuals because they wish to maintain control, complete control through rules is an impossibility because of the scope for individual choice.

For the purposes of the current doctoral study, applications of Foucault's concept of governmentality are found to be over-deterministic. It is maintained herewith that individuals are not automata to be fashioned by an organisation or by government

into passive acceptance of oppression. Rather, every individual has a choice and is active in making that choice, even if that choice is acceptance of the status quo. This thesis rejects any notion of determinism. It is hoped that a focus on practices will allow for a more proactive individual. Therefore, I now move on to look at the work of others on practices and, in particular, on care of the self practices which perhaps have a greater emancipatory potential for a theory of self-regulation than does the Panopticon.

### **The 'Practice Turn'**

Before turning to works that embrace Foucault's concept of practices, I start by locating other versions of practices that are circulating in the academic community. Whittington refers to a 'practice turn' taking place from the 1980s which he identifies, generally, as a response to overcoming the dualism between the individual and the social: "*the practice instinct is to resist the choice between micro-detail and larger social forces*" (2006:615). Whittington (2006) pinpoints the practice turn within strategy research as a switch from treating strategy as a property that organisations possess towards engaging with strategy as something that people do. This body of strategy research is generally referred to as strategy-as-practice. Chia concurs with this view that the social/individual boundary in strategy is blurring for he states that strategy-as-practice is a response to increasing pressure to "*attend to the myriad micro-processes and practices of organizational life that are woven together to form meaningful strategic outcomes*" (2004:29). Proponents of strategy-as-practice seek to link practice and theory by focusing on strategic practitioners. In looking at practices, they are concerned with those activities that lie underneath the routines of everyday strategic life.



A key catalyst for the emergence of strategy-as-practice appears to have been a Foucauldian-inspired seminal paper produced by Knights and Morgan (1991) who portray strategy as a power mechanism for managerial subjectivity, transforming individuals into the kind of person who feels good about themselves because of participating in strategic practices. Moreover, "*Strategy, then, is an integral part, and not independent, of the actions or practices that it is frequently drawn upon to explain or justify*" (268), thus rendering self-reflection problematic. Knights and Morgan call for a radical break in the study of corporate strategy and develop a framework for a new approach as an alternative to the rational and processualist approaches of which they are deeply critical. This new approach would involve "*focusing upon corporate strategy as a set of discourses and practices which transform managers and employees alike into subjects who secure their sense of purpose and reality by formulating, evaluating and conducting strategy*" (Knights and Morgan, 1991:252). However, whilst focusing on practices of a kind, strategy-as-practice seems to have lost its Foucauldian bearings. Much of the strategy-as-practice work is not Foucault-inspired, as can be seen from the Strategy-as-practice website dedicated to this body of work. For a similar critique, see Ezzamel and Willmott (2004).

Another main subscriber to the practice turn is Schatzki, for whom practices are: "*organized human activities*" (Schatzki, 2005:471). Schatzki attempts to break down the social/individual boundary through a new form of social ontology whereby "*the site of the social is a mesh of practices and material arrangements*" (Schatzki, 2005:472). The example he provides is of an academic department that embraces the following practices: "*grading practices, research practices, advising practices, governance practices, administrative practices, meeting practices, community-building practices, and consultation practices*", together with material arrangements



such as room layouts (Schatzki, 2005:474). Now, while Schatzki refers to grading practices, which could be linked to Foucault's concept of normalising practices, Schatzki is talking about practices at a different level from Foucault. Foucault conceives practices as games of truth; the ways in which people act are linked to particular ways of thinking. Hence, Foucault's practices are secondary to primary practices such as administration and accounting. It is probably fair to say that Schatzki's practice turn is more influenced by Heidegger than by Foucault.

Meanwhile, practices of everyday life (Certeau, 1984) depend on an ensemble of procedures, whereby procedures are "*schemes of operations and of technical manipulations*" (43). Certeau's reading of practices is broad and he tends to juxtapose the terms "practices" and "processes". Certeau's practices concern "*everyday tactics*" (115). He acknowledges Foucault for providing insight into how these little practices of examining and so on are fundamental to the way we produce truth. Nevertheless, Certeau is attempting to merge the theories of Bourdieu and Foucault which, for me, is potentially problematic since Bourdieu and Foucault do not sit well together. Whilst Foucault refrains from imposing a boundary between the social and the individual, Bourdieu is very much a sociologist in the neo-Marxist tradition. As a result, and unlike other theorists on practices, Certeau assigns a passive role to the individual. Correspondingly, Certeau's practices are a way of reproducing the socioeconomic system.

Another popular way of doing practices is to refer to a community of practice as a locus for knowledge management. The concept of a community of practice stems from Lave and Wenger's theory of situated learning as "*a theory of social practice in which learning is viewed as an aspect of all activity*" (1991:37-8). Lave and Wenger situate learning within the context of social practice whereby one learns by participating in the social world, as opposed to a traditional notion of learning taking

place as an individual cognitive process. As with Certeau, Lave and Wenger are inspired by Bourdieu and hence their vision is one of stressing the role of the social in learning. The term “community of practice” has since been applied to networks of informal learning outside the formal education system. A community of practice provides a focus for bringing together individuals who would otherwise not talk to each other and has become very popular within the knowledge industries. Similarly to a community of practice, Foucault’s practices operate within a pedagogic context. Differently, however, Foucault’s practices are the seemingly unimportant mechanisms such as writing and examining that underpin the activities conducted by a community of practice. Foucault’s practices focus more on the individual than does a community of practice which engages in social practices through networking.

Finally, the word “practice” is often used in the singular tense as a reference to the way that things are done, or how the theory translates into practice. Tied in with this singular use of “practice” is the notion of “good practice” which refers more to the way in which operations in general should be carried out. For instance, LAUTRO as regulator of life assurance sales offices aims to instigate practitioners into operating “good practice” by tasking regulatory officials to remove rogues or cowboys who undermine life assurance as a moral practice (Grey, 1992). Nonetheless, “practice” has potential to encompass the kind of “practices” that Foucault theorises and Grey goes on to analyse these micro-level life assurance practices (1992).

### **Foucault’s Practices**

Having considered various uses of the term “practices” that are not derived from Foucault, this section re-engages with Foucault to reflect on a selection of theoretical and empirical studies that draw on Foucault’s concept of practices.

Hoskin (1994) maintains that Foucault provides little of a theoretical grounding for practices. Hoskin proposes going beyond Foucault to develop a new theory of practices. He suggests researchers can use both practices and discourse to enable them to move *"beyond the old futile oscillations, since both practices and discourse are located in between the traditional langue/parole, material/ideal and social/individual oppositions"* (78). Regarding discourse, I have not attempted to write a complete section on this significant concept of Foucault's. Perhaps this is because, according to Veyne (1997) <sup>8</sup> *"the word discourse has created a great deal of confusion"*. Hoskin provides a clear explanation in that *"discourse as a term concerns what at a given era is said, written, thought out of all the things that could be said, written and thought"* (67). In any era, there is a play between discourse and practice:

"Discourse is, for each of us and all of us, what is historically given as the previously-said, but then in our own histories (social and individual) it is shaped and developed to say the previously-unsaid. Practices similarly are technologies which socially we cannot avoid yet which individually we internalize in varying ways, with effects that are both socially regular and personally differentiated. Together, the operation of practises and discourse is what enables the construction of us as differing individuals in historically specific contexts." (Hoskin, 1994:78)

This extract offers a recap on the synchronic and diachronic referred to earlier in this chapter. What one thinks and does at any one time regarding a topic, say organic, is shaped by other things that have been said and done at different historical moments. And one's current articulation through discourse or practice almost immediately becomes another historical moment that may contribute to the construction of future articulations. Hence, whilst what has been said previously about "organic", the topic of this thesis, is handed down to us as discourse, the



previously unsaid about “organic” is there for us to say within our own lifetimes. Each of us is a product “*of the play of the historically-given discourse and practices we encounter and internalize, but then also the author of our personal vision of the previously-unsaid*” (Hoskin, 1994:79). In this sense, practices and discourses are not something that are imposed upon us, but are produced by each of us as individuals within a social and historically specific setting.

Hoskin & Macve (1988) provide an exemplary account of how accounting technologies grew out of changes in the practices theorised by Foucault. For Hoskin & Macve, Foucault’s practices are secondary to the more fundamental primary practice of education. Hence, the secondary practices that change are those of examining, recording and appraisal at various pedagogic sites, all of which have a pedagogic context. The main pedagogic site is cited as West Point Military Academy in the United States, whose graduates were key innovators of cost accounting on the US railroads. At West Point, Sylvanus Thayer implemented human accountability techniques through use of a new grading system borrowed from l’École Polytechnique that combined numerical and linguistic grading.

Others claim that Foucault’s sort of practices can be used as a means of control in which power is exerted top-down. Knights & Collinson (1987) identify several different types of practices used to control shopfloor workers in a manufacturing organisation including human resource practices taking form through a glossy in-house magazine as a PR exercise to disseminate company news, financial accounting practices providing “concrete” evidence that large-scale redundancies are inevitable, and individualising practices that divide workers and erode the opportunity for collective resistance. In querying how almost an entire workforce could acquiesce to redundancy on such a scale, the authors (Knights & Collinson, 1987) state that “*domination and control ... is the taken-for-granted experience of*



*shopfloor workers*" (471), thereby leaning rather heavily on the social at the expense of the individual. Now, this account is problematic. Firstly, except for brief mention of normalisation and surveillance, Knights and Collinson are analysing their findings in terms of primary level practices without breaking these down in any detail to the secondary level practices in which Foucault is interested. Secondly, the authors adopt a very non-Foucault notion of power as repressive within a scenario of determinist domination of one group, managers, over another, workers.

Similarly, Styhre (2001) applies Foucault-inspired practices in a way that would have been alien to Foucault. Here, the practices are those presented in Foucault's later work on an ethics of the self. In Styhre's account, kaizen practices are implemented as a mechanism for exerting power top-down in three manufacturing companies in Sweden. However, for Styhre, an ethics of the self refers to one's self as being managed by someone other than the self to "*create desirable managerial outcomes (easier operations, lower costs)*" (807). This account is thus found to be over-deterministic for implying that one constitutes oneself as an ethical subject only to accord with managerial objectives and make a contribution to the company.

Townley (1993; 1994; 1998) is well-regarded for employing a wide range of Foucault's practices to examine human resource (HR) departments in work organisations. Townley examines the "*actual practices which introduce domains and individuals to enunciation and visibility – the mechanisms of inscription, recording and calculation*" (1994:16) and their effects. Unlike the studies by Knights & Collinson and Styhre referred to above, for Townley (1994) power is exercised and not held, productive and not repressive, and is located in practices rather than in individuals. Practices such as enclosure, partitioning and ranking (taken from Foucault, 1977) are used to implement job classifications, job ladders, job evaluation schemes, skills inventories, performance appraisal systems,

assessments, attitude measurements, and selection testing, all of which make the human subject very knowable. Examination and confession practices (taken from Florence, 1994; Foucault, 1988a) operate as follows (Townley, 1994). The examination is manifested through individualisation, that is the process of making individual differences visible, and individuation, which is those practices that attempt to identify components of individuality within one individual. Meanwhile, confession is enacted through application forms, pre-screening inventories, selection interviews, development appraisals, and mentoring. Taxonomy and mathesis (see Foucault, 1970) together create a grid and are used to define hierarchical networks, for they “*provide an order that simultaneously circumscribes a whole, and specifies its component parts*” (Townley, 1994:31). All in all, for the purposes of this thesis the analysis is too determinist, for: “*the individual is rendered more amenable to management*” (Townley, 1993:533). Through examining practices that produce knowledge of the workforce and thereby make the workforce manageable and by centering on mechanisms and practices that are responsible for “*how individuals and their activities become organized*” (Townley, 1994:18), this approach assigns too passive a role to the individual for the current research study, which is looking at the conduct of the self in regulation. Townley does acknowledge that the individual is both an object and a subject of knowledge, for “*the techniques that make individuals objects of knowledge and power also constitute them as subjects*” (1994:109) and she cites the confession as the principle technology for producing self-knowledge. However, that self-knowledge always seems to be in Townley’s work something that is there to be harnessed by the employing organisation rather than by the individual. For example, “*The disciplinary effect emerges when the individual becomes tied, through the desire to secure the acknowledgement, recognition and confirmation of self, to practices confirmed by others as desirable*” (Townley, 1994:142). It is HR that “*controls activity and*

*constitutes the individual as an object and subject of knowledge*" (Townley, 1994:143), rather than the individuals themselves. This approach comes across as pessimistic, which may be more to do with the context of work organisations than with Foucault's practices. By switching attention to organic food producers rather than work organisations, it is anticipated that this thesis will be able to explore practices in a more positive way for the individual.

Both Veyne (1997) and Anderson-Gough (2005) emphasise Foucault's assertion that a focus on practices helps in removing the opposition between the individual and the social. Veyne maintains:

"The opposition between individual and society is a false problem: if we conceive of the individual and society as two realities external to one another, then we can imagine that one causes the other: causality presupposes exteriority. But if we realize that what is called society already includes the participation of individuals, the problem disappears: the "objective reality" of society includes the fact that individuals are interested in it and make it function." (Veyne, 1997:163fn5)

Clearly, Veyne is saying that society does not function as an entity without the participation of individuals and therefore individuals and the social cannot be external to each other. Anderson-Gough (2005) refers to expertise developed through knowledge practices as *"knowing how to frame problems and ask questions effectively, how to research issues adequately, knowing how to diagnose, when to investigate further and when there is nothing significant to concern oneself or others about etc"* (26). She asks why such expertise is not readily transferable between academia and the accounting profession. She claims that an emphasis on practices, by providing a means to break the social-individual divide and escape context-bound socialisation theories, is a way forward for enabling individuals to transfer expertise across different situations and experiences.



Accordingly, to move beyond the social-individual divide, this doctoral study will focus on practices. The conceptual framework elaborated on in this chapter centres on Foucault's engagement of the self in the regulation process. Before finishing, I must consider the work that is now being produced on and around Foucault's concept of subjectivisation-objectivisation interplay.

### **Towards Subjectivisation-Objectivisation**

Having reviewed how others have applied Foucault's theme of practices, I focus now on studies that are interested in the relationship between object and subject in care of the self practices. At the time of writing, published work on this little-researched theoretical area of subjectivisation-objectivisation processes, as described by Foucault in Florence (1994), is beginning to emerge through working papers and conference papers. In this section, I review both these works and some earlier publications in which traces of subjectivisation-objectivisation can be detected.

Coors acknowledges the following reference made by Foucault: "*What are the relations we have to truth through scientific knowledge, to those 'truth games' which are so important in civilization and in which we are both subject and object?*" (Martin, 1988:15, cited in Coors, 2003:282). However, Coors does not elaborate on the interplay between objectivisation and subjectivisation. In recommending the use of technologies of the self to maintain an element of individual control, Coors is careful to point out that Foucault does not equate power with oppression or domination but, nevertheless, she oscillates between this position and its direct opposite: that power represses the self and therefore must be resisted by those who are powerless. Maintaining that the self is usually socially constructed, she assigns a controlling and dominating role to discipline and to "dominant discourses",



particularly the scientific discourse of genetic technology, to which individuals may succumb. To avoid succumbing, she asserts that Foucault "*charges us with continuing the struggle against power as a means of caring for the self*" (Coors:2003:286) and nominates the task as "*to identify those practices of freedom that ... resist abusive power over the self and others*" (Coors:2003:287).

Ibarra-Colado et al (2006) share with Coors the non-Foucault like view that power is repressive. Nevertheless, they attempt to blur the social/individual boundary by showing that ethics is neither the exclusive property of the individual or the organisation but "*instead they [ethics] are a complex and mutually constituting relationship between the two*" (46). Even so, in opposition to Foucault's theoretical position, Ibarra-Colado et al (2006:51) refer to power as "*exercised over subjects in order to manage their conduct and govern their action within an organized space*". Moreover, Ibarra-Colado et al (2006) are utilising Foucault's concept of the care of the self as self-improvement through self-reflection and taking responsibility for one's own acts, but they are also assigning a relatively passive role to the individual whose freedom, they say, is "*located and constituted in relations of power*" (47). For the purposes of this doctoral study, it is important to be clear that at no point does Foucault set up a binary opposition between control by others and freedom of the self or, in other words, between regulation and self-regulation. Furthermore, the authors are confusing the disciplinary practices associated with the emergence of the Human Sciences and the care of the self practices analysed later on by Foucault. To some extent, this is quite understandable, for Foucault wrote a lot of texts and a surface reading of them could quite feasibly promote such an understanding. To reiterate, both forms of practices employ the dual processes of objectivisation and subjectivisation. The difference is that in the case of the disciplinary practices associated with the emergence of the Human Sciences, one's

self is the subject but another is the object; whereas in the case of care of the self practices, one's self is both subject and object.

Familiarity with Foucault's earlier work, particularly *Discipline and Punish*, tends to overshadow research around his less-read later work, which is then meshed with a "power is repressive" theme that goes against my reading of Foucault. Casey (1999) studies the attempt by an American multinational corporation to improve productivity by implementing a culture change oriented towards family. This was done with the intention of gaining employee involvement by making employees feel as though work was part of their self-development, self-fulfilment and identity. Casey points out the non family-like practices that contradicted these aims such as getting rid of people who "do not fit in". In her analysis, Casey divides regulation and self-regulation into two separate theories. Firstly, she uses Foucault to analyse how the culture is socially composed by the corporation through discourse and disciplinary practices. Secondly, she uses social psychoanalysis to explain how employees adapt to this culture change. Instead of using social psychoanalysis, Casey could have blurred the social-individual boundary by utilising Foucault's processes of objectivisation and subjectivisation that employees engaged in to acclimatise to the new culture.

Unlike Ibarra-Colado et al (2006) and Coors (2003), there are studies that view care of the self as engaging a more proactive individual. In 2003, a special issue of *Journal of Medical Humanities* applied Foucault's work on ethics of the self to standard problems within the field of bioethics such as informed consent and reproductive technologies. In the introduction to this special issue, Frank & Jones (2003) consider that generally people working in medicine have focused on Foucault's work up to *Discipline and Punish* and disregarded his later work. Referring to technologies of the self and their dependence upon truth games, Frank

& Jones (2003) contend that the sorts of truth games propagated by cosmetics companies and public health institutes are dependent upon a presupposition "*that people are constituted by some essence – they are fat, alcoholic, mentally ill, or any combination of proliferating labels*" (183). Now while Foucault rejected essentialism, it is clear that the processes of objectivisation, whereby the ideal type representation of a healthy person is projected towards an individual, and subjectivisation, whereby the individual internalises this representation and chooses in what way to identify with the representation, are at work here.

To reiterate, Foucault maintains that objectivisation cannot operate without subjectivisation and vice versa (Florence, 1994:315). The following paper refers explicitly to subjectivisation in the analysis, but ignores the process of objectivisation with which subjectivisation interacts. McDonald (2004) analyses a case study in a Primary Care Trust (PCT) to show how a code-oriented morality based on hierarchical rules and training is imposed upon and used to construct an ethics of the self. Harnessing a discourse of empowerment, the PCT provides a programme that aims to transform strong-minded and influential employees into selves that act more rationally and are able to control their emotions. Now, McDonald does address Foucault's concept of subjectivisation, but ignores the twin process of objectivisation, resulting in what might appear to be a deterministic process and outcome for the individuals. However, if the analysis is taken further to embrace subjectivisation-objectivisation as a dual process, then the autonomous and creative role of the individual in transforming the ethical subject can be revived. Indeed, McDonald does conclude from talking to respondents that participants are more likely to resist than comply with attempts to shape their ethical selves, but she needs to extend subjectivisation to subjectivisation-objectivisation to be able to explain how this is so.



Townley (1994) refers to objectivisation briefly, using the term interchangeably with objectification to define "*the reduction of individuals to standardized, describable and measurable dimensions*" (92). However, by ignoring the simultaneous process of subjectivisation through which individuals internalise HRM, she paints a pessimistic picture in which the ethical self seems to play little part in the proceedings.

Veyne (1997) too focuses on objectivisation without reference to subjectivisation. Veyne urges that we stop focusing on natural objects "*in order to notice a certain practice, a very specifically dated one, that objectified those objects in a respect that is as dated as the practice itself*" (1997:150). Here, Veyne is talking about objectivisation as a practice through which one turns things into objects. Objects do not have a prior existence, for they are brought into existence by the practice of objectivisation. To explain how we often overlook practices, Veyne compares practices with the concealed base of an iceberg "*in order to indicate that it presents itself to our spontaneous sight only heavily veiled, and that it is largely preconceptual*" (1997:156)<sup>9</sup>. An object such as a governed people, then, is only what it is in relation to that practice: "*The eternal governed ... does not exist apart from the practice that is applied to it; its existence, if there is such a thing, is not indicated by any concrete aspect ... A notion that is connected to nothing in practice is only a word*" (Veyne 1997:155). Hence, all objects are "false natural objects" which we historicise through the practice of objectivisation: "*The method thus consists, for Foucault, in understanding that things are only objectivizations of determined practices and that the determinations must be brought to light, since consciousness fails to conceptualize them*" (Veyne, 1977:159). Hence, for Veyne, ideology does not exist: "*Infrastructure and superstructure, interest and ideology, and so on are no longer anything but useless patchworks imposed on a practice*



*that functioned very well as it was and that is once again functioning very well*" (1997:159).

Veyne elaborates on a paradox that is central to Foucault's thesis: an object is explained by examining what went into its making at each moment in history; whereas we tend to turn this the other way round and try and explain a practice on the basis of what is made (Veyne, 1977:160-1). That is, instead of starting with the practice, we begin with the object. Hence, we reify objectivisations as if they were natural objects (Veyne, 1977:161). Madness, for example, is not an object but is something that has been objectivised: "*Madness exists as an object only in and through a practice*" (Veyne, 1997:167). Furthermore, since madness does not pre-exist practice, "*there is no such thing as "madness through the ages" "* (171). Veyne is negating the idea of an object that evolves through time but always remains in the same place: "*A false natural object such as religion or a certain religion aggregates very dissimilar elements (ritualism, sacred books, a sense of security, disparate emotions, and so on) that, in other eras, will be expressed in very different practices and objectivized through these practices in very different guises*" (Veyne, 1997:171-2). Like Foucault, Veyne is confronting the traditional view of history as a progressive continuity.

I finish by considering the few emerging papers I have found that explore the interplay of subjectivisation and objectivisation.

Beckett & Nayak pinpoint how the mass media promotes ideal types, through which individuals are exhorted to identify with the aesthetics of perfect dress sense, good health, a perfect figure, and so on:

“Modern life has become saturated with images of self-conduct, self-formation and self-problematisations, programmes such as BBC’s ‘What Not to Wear’ and Channel 4’s ‘You are What You Eat’ explicitly promote a reflexive notion of the self in relation to the buying and wearing of clothing and eating.” (2006:5)

Using data collected from Clubcard holders, Tesco classifies each individual consumer into a type and identifies variances between the individual’s behaviour and the norm for that type (14). By offering small incentives in the form of vouchers, Tesco encourages consumers to change their shopping behaviour. Through promotions, Tesco generates new expert-based identities to aspire to including the successful barbecue host and the wine connoisseur. Individuals are ready to recognise themselves within the identities presented to them and they shape their lives and their consumption decisions accordingly (23). Beckett and Nayak (2006) explore the willingness to be governed by Tesco Clubcard. The purpose of technologies of the self:

“is to harness individuals’ reflexivity, encouraging them to relate to themselves as a subject, the enterprising employee, responsible father, or conscientious citizen, and come to understand themselves and their lives in relation to these ‘ideal’ forms. Power is exercised by encouraging the individual to identify with a subject which they act out or perform in their everyday lives.” (8)

Here, in their analysis, Beckett & Nayak seem to be saying that technologies of the self are capable of being hijacked by someone other than the self and used to exploit the self in the interests of making more sales for Tesco. The authors contend that, in this way, free individuals in society are governed by modern forms of government. Now, whilst the normalising and observing practices from *Discipline and Punish* can be seen to be objectivising the consumer through feedback gained from Tesco Clubcard, it is more difficult to envisage how an individual’s inner

thoughts can be predicted and harnessed to the extent that care of the self practices become shifted to “care of Tesco”. Running through this analysis is a kind of dialectics between control and freedom whereby, whilst striving to bring the individual back into the social, the authors are trying hard simultaneously to incorporate the notion of power as repressive, a theme that has run through several of the Foucault-inspired works looked at already.

Starkey and McKinlay (1998) go some way towards explaining how this may be so:

“A major shift from his [*Foucault's*] earlier work is in the concept of ‘subjectification’. Previously, this was equated with ‘subjection’. In the later work, subjectification is a process that involves the willing development and exercise of power and knowledge through the development of ‘technologies of the self’. Foucault’s earlier works study how human beings are ‘made subjects’. The later work is dedicated to the principle of the formation and transformation of the self by the self and challenges us to reconsider discipline as perhaps the necessary price that we have to pay for realizing our desires.” (232)

Here, Starkey and McKinlay suggest that while works such as *Discipline and Punish* show us how discipline allows others to make objects of our selves, Foucault’s later work on technologies of the self has emancipatory potential for showing how individuals can make objects of and create their own selves, thereby providing insight into how things might be. Understandably, then, those inspired by Foucault, in trying to make sense of one of these aspects, can be torn between the two.

In contrast, Anderson-Gough uses the subjectivisation-objectivisation dynamic within her analysis of the accounting profession to provide a way of allowing both for proactiveness on the part of the individual and for individual differences: “*Within*



*a Foucauldian exploration of the dynamics of subjectivity we can explore the way individuals work on themselves to become similar to and different from others in their desired social grouping*” (Anderson-Gough, 2005:15). She rejects the idea of learning through socialisation for its implication of a relatively passive process of learning the rules of the social group to which we belong and offers the alternative of subjectivisation-objectivisation as a means to understanding *“the way we manage to reflect on our daily work as good work, how we care for the self in this practical way”* (15). Anderson-Gough contends that the process of learning is not entirely social for people work at and internalise certain ways of being via the secondary practices such as writing, grading and examining and so these practices become part of the individual. Furthermore, *“the experience of education can have multiple and powerful consequences that were never intentionally part of any curriculum design or lesson plan”* (Anderson-Gough, 2005:20, emphasis in original).

Frandsen & Hoskin (2006) provide an elaborate theoretical explanation of subjectivisation-objectivisation. Starting from Florence, they state: *“An integral aspect of thought is the thinking of one’s self as object of thought”* (6). Frandsen & Hoskin assign themselves the “project” of tracing the “reciprocal interplay” of objectivisation and subjectivisation from which truth games are produced *“via the engagement of the subject in practices that in being engaged in are also constitutive of the subject”* (6). The authors apply their project to an empirical analysis of an initiative to change the mindset of Swedish bus drivers towards a customer focused and professional role. Through training and other techniques, *“objectivization of the subject is put into interplay with the driver’s mode of subjectivization”* (Frandsen & Hoskin, 2006:5) to assign a new professional identity to the bus driver. Through participating in ‘Knowledge Bus’ training, *“a training which articulates a new kind of objectivization of the subject as driver”* (Frandsen &

Hoskin, 2006:4), the Swedish bus driver is assigned not only the role of a competent driver but also that of a customer-facing professional. The Knowledge Bus itself is described as a “theatre-in-action” wherein a two-hour play, representing how the bus driver handles different kinds of situations, unfolds during the bus journey. The bus driver and passengers are actors who present scenes to an audience of “real” bus drivers. A facilitator leads a discussion of the scenes and what has happened in them. The actors improvise each scene according to what is being discussed and the mood of the audience of “real” bus drivers. A supplementary DVD *“made it possible, in a more effective and extensive way, to objectivize the subject as driver, and to start seeing, reflecting on, and changing the way a bus driver should perform his/her role so that he or she would conform more to the new style of public transport customer focus”* (18). Other artefacts include posters, a drivers’ certificate, an internet site, and an 84-page long ‘Manual of Good Practice’ which outlines the three new roles on which the professional bus driver is to be judged in terms of performance as “driver”, “service professional” and “cashier”.

Frandsen & Hoskin go on to elaborate on how these practices that the subject engages in operate synchronically, that is in the here and now, and diachronically, which is more complex and works in three ways. Firstly, practices emanate *“from a historically given and so determinate [sic] elsewhere, the social and cultural past and the practices established as part of that past and so operating in the present”* (2006:7). In other words, one cannot negate what has happened in the past when dealing with the present; the way one objectivises and subjectivises will be conditioned by the social and the cultural within a given historical context. Secondly:

“They [practices] cannot simply be the actions engaged in by the subject, either in a pure internal relation to itself or in a relation that draws in some other or others.

They will include what is sedimented and circulated in that time and space as rules of action and thought, more informally 'accepted' ways of doing things, and the practices involved in forming objectives, whether explicit or tacit." (2006:7)

That is, the individual is not an island who can isolate her/himself from what is going on around including conventions from the social that establish how the individual engages in objectivisation. Thirdly, primary practices are undertaken in the synchronic only, but secondary practices operate both synchronically "*beneath the surface of the practices undertaken in the here and now*" (7) and diachronically "*to set up and maintain the framing of the specifically given rules, accepted ways of doing things, and tacit and explicit objectives accepted and internalised by subjects and articulated in the practices undertaken in the here and now*" (7). Accordingly, the secondary practices of writing, pedagogy, and valuing "*construct ways of objectivizing the subject that can then become part of one's subjectivization*" (8). In Ancient Greece, whilst writing played a central role as the medium for pedagogic texts on how to live an ethical life, it was pedagogy itself that was integral to becoming an ethical self:

"For one becomes ethical only by putting one's self in a learning relation to a worthy pedagogic other, the philosophical master, whose most famous example is Socrates. Then one must engage in a life-long pedagogic practice in relation to one's self, internalizing the pedagogic voice that points the way to ethical action."  
(8)

Correspondingly, valuing as a secondary practice takes place through the evaluation and self-appraisal that is a constant activity in caring for the self. Furthermore, one might begin caring for the self with the aid of an other with the objective of eventually being able to fulfil this role of the pedagogic other by oneself.



To date, research on the interplay of subjectivisation-objectivisation is only just emerging. By investigating how organic is regulated, it is anticipated that the current doctoral thesis study will provide a significant contribution to this under-researched area.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has set out a conceptual framework that leans heavily on Foucault for an investigation into the regulation of organic food production. A number of Foucault's texts were used to construct the framework before looking at the work of others who have been inspired by Foucault also.

From Foucault's texts, it was decided to explore a number of key themes including history, discipline and power, governmentality, practices, subjectivisation-objectivisation, care of the self and ethics. Moreover, Foucault dissolved a number of boundaries including, social/individual, power/resistance, ruler/ruled, regulation/self-regulation, and the present and the past, loosely translated as the synchronic and diachronic. The interplay of objectivisation and subjectivisation was found to provide a constant presence as was a historical dimension. This was a different type of history, though, for Foucault approaches historical analysis 'from the bottom up'. In other words, less obvious things done at the micro-level may be more significant than is commonly supposed. Indeed, there may not even be a macro-level. In rejecting the notion of power as repressive and as in the possession of certain individuals or social groups or bodies such as state apparatuses, Foucault is presenting a radically different analysis from theorists such as Marx. For Foucault, power always operates locally at multiple locations. This rather different conception of power underpins Foucault's other conceptual themes. Governmentality refers to management in the interests of maintaining a healthy

population but also managing one's self, one's household, a school class, a collective living group such as a convent, a flock of sheep, and so on. Governmentality therefore corresponds to a pastoral, rather than authoritarian, role.

Practices were ascertained to be a theme running through all of Foucault's work and to refer to a particular kind of practice, namely techniques for producing truth. Underlying practices is the interplay of objectivisation, which is the process by which a subject becomes an object of knowledge, and subjectivisation, which is the process by which a subject becomes subject to a particular type of knowledge (Florence, 1994:315). Practices are ways of thinking and acting. In his earlier work, Foucault identifies disciplinary practices whereby an object and subject are separated as one or more persons working on an other to produce truth through the interplay of objectivisation and subjectivisation. In his later work, Foucault identifies care of the self practices, also referred to as technologies of the self, as the means by which individuals apply the truth game to themselves through self-examination and other practices. In doing so, an individual becomes both object and subject in an subjectivisation-objectivisation interplay. Through care of the self, an individual also engages in an ethics of the self. Hence, instead of adhering to an ethical code of behaviour received from outside oneself, the ethical self makes her/his own decisions about how to act in an ethical way. So that, even when there are rules that one is expected to follow, the ethical self has a choice as to how to respond to such rules. Preserving the relationship one has with oneself is more important to the ethical self than following rules obediently.

This conceptual framework was chosen and developed following talks with an organic food producer who suggested that some producers were more "organic" than others. That particular producer drew my attention to how some producers will have always farmed organically whilst others may have used sprays to farm non-

organically until deciding to convert to organic for whatever reason. Hence, the conceptual framework outlined above seems to offer potential to explain how individual organic food producers might vary in their ethical commitment to farming organically and also allows for following the standards, which are the rules of the certifying bodies. Through this framework, I am able to reject the distinction between the social and the individual and, in so doing, blur the boundary between regulation and self-regulation.

The second half of this chapter examined the work of other authors who have been inspired by Foucault. Many seem to have found Foucault's work most accessible by following the model of the Panopticon. There is also considerable effort directed towards governmentality. However, underlying many works was found the notion that power is repressive with a great deal of emphasis on the social rather than on the individual. Many studies referred to one social group having control or authority over another and reflected an approach coming more from Marx than from Foucault. There were also studies based on Foucault's theme of practices that were pessimistic with little regard for the self-regulating individual who has choices. Even care of the self practices were found by some to have been hijacked by others at the individual's expense. It was decided that there was confusion because, whilst care of the self practices have emancipatory potential, authors were also associating the notion of disciplinary practices with repression since Foucault makes many references to prisons and other institutions. At the bottom of this confusion lay the subjectivisation-objectivisation interplay which operates differently in the two cases. With care of the self practices, an individual works on her/himself as both object and subject. With disciplinary practices, a person works on another by making the self the subject but by making the other the object; many took this to be repressive and exploitative, although Foucault himself did not.



The next chapter sets up a methodology in order to use the conceptual framework outlined in this chapter to address the question “How is organic regulated?”. To this end, it is envisaged that the investigation will focus on self-regulation and, to do so, will employ Foucault’s concepts of code-oriented and ethics-oriented moralities.

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<sup>1</sup> As Barratt (2002:201) remarks, there is a tendency for critics of “*Foucauldianism*” to fail to distinguish between Foucault’s “*own project*” and the work of interpreters of Foucault. Foucault is often criticised heavily on the basis of statements made by others: “*It is the case that many of the well-established criticisms of Foucault ... can be seen to be founded on a misinterpretation of his work*” (Brewis, 2001:55). Indeed, Foucault himself was cynical of ever being heard again as he was at the beginning and chose to remain anonymous in an interview he gave to *Le Monde*: “*Why have I suggested that I remain anonymous? Out of nostalgia for the time when, being completely unknown, what I said had some chance of being heard*” (Foucault, [1980]/1996:302).

<sup>2</sup> It is now recognised that “Maurice Florence” is a pseudonym and that Foucault himself was the principal author of this piece, which was written during the early 1980s and was published recently with Foucault named as principal author (see Foucault, 2000f).

<sup>3</sup> Clearly, this autobiography was written at a particular moment in time late on in Foucault’s life and I have indicated already Foucault’s reluctance to be pinned down. At a different point in his intellectual career, say earlier, or later on if he had lived longer, he may have given a very different account of his life’s work.

<sup>4</sup> In the late eighteenth century publication *The Theory of Moral Sentiment*, Adam Smith demonstrates intersubjectivity at play, for he talks about behaving in a way that others will judge him to be a man of good conduct, including the feeling of security that one obtains from rendering oneself worthy of the most favourable regards of one’s fellow-creatures (Smith, 1790:212). He also follows the Stoic tradition of acting as his own examiner: “We

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*endeavour to examine our own conduct as we imagine any other fair and impartial spectator would examine it*" (Smith, 1790:277).

<sup>5</sup> African slaves were imported into Latin America and the roots of their "slave-dances" can be observed in modern Latin dance today such as the Merengue and the Samba. The slaves found ingenious ways of inventing dance-moves that were possible within the confines of being shackled together at the ankles with ball and chain.

<sup>6</sup> Child area curfews are "*designed to protect young children who because they are out on the streets unsupervised may be at risk of harm or getting into trouble*" (Home Office, 1998, section 4.1). The Welfare-to-Work program was instigated in the United States to limit the time that welfare recipients could collect benefits and to provide training to get them into employment.

<sup>7</sup> In this quotation, ten Bos (1997) refers to *The Use of Pleasure* (Foucault, 1984a).

<sup>8</sup> In a late text, Foucault (1984a:8) acknowledges how much he has benefited from the work of Paul Veyne.

<sup>9</sup> Deleuze uses the concept of folding to explain the intersection of the social and the individual: "*in all his work Foucault seems haunted by this theme of an inside which is merely the fold of the outside, as if the ship were a folding of the sea*" ([1986]/1999:97). For Deleuze, the inside is the doubling of the outside: "*It is not a doubling of the One, but a redoubling of the Other. It is not a reproduction of the Same, but a repetition of the Different. It is not the emanation of an 'I', but something that places in immanence an always other or a Non-self. It is never the other who is a double in the doubling process, it is a self that lives me as the double of the other: I do not encounter myself on the outside, I find the other in me*" ([1986]/1999:98).

## 4 Methodology

### Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide a methodological framework within which to answer the question of how is organic regulated. I begin by addressing how to apply Foucault's methodological rules. I then explore Foucault's concepts of genealogy and archaeology and relate how I apply genealogy/archaeology as a methodology in the empirical work recorded in Chapter 5. Next I look at what others have to say about ethnography and relate how I apply ethnography in the empirical work recorded in Chapters 6 and 7.

### Foucault's Methodological Rules

The previous chapter reveals the extent to which Foucault's thoughts are embedded in my own thinking. A thesis that bases its conceptual framework so heavily on Foucault will draw inevitably on Foucault's insights into methodology. Accordingly, this section groups together the methodological principles and rules that are incorporated into several of Foucault's texts, namely *The Order of Discourse* (Foucault, 1981), *History of Sexuality Volume 1* (Foucault, ([1976]/1988)) and Foucault's autobiography (Florence, 1994).

### **Four Methodological Principles: *The Order of Discourse***

In *The Order of Discourse*, Foucault elaborates on the four methodological principles of reversal, discontinuity, specificity, and exteriority (1981:67-8).

Foucault's principle of reversal undermines the traditional sourcing of discourses in the author, the discipline, and the will to truth, all of which Said describes as



*“metaphors for originating authority”* ([1977]/1997:297). In the traditional view, discourse rarefies such figures. Said ([1977]/1997:299) comments on the traditional view: *“It becomes futile – because radically inaccurate – to view a speaker as really beginning a discourse, still less as being its master”*. Instead of searching for a point of creation, Foucault recommends looking at seemingly inconsequential events that may have been obscured by more traditional forms of history.

Foucault’s principle of discontinuity undermines the previous glossing over of discontinuities in history by historians. Foucault defines discontinuity as *“threshold, rupture, break, mutation, transformation”* ([1969]/1989:6). Discontinuity is:

“A play of specific transformations, each one different from the next..., linked together according to schemes of dependence. History is the descriptive analysis and the theory of these transformations.” (Foucault, 1991b:59)

Foucault asserts that there is not a cohesive unified history buried away waiting for historians to bring out of hiding. Nevertheless, traditional history assumes that history is made up of cohesive stages or phases:

“The raw material of history, which presented itself in the form of dispersed events – decisions, accidents, initiatives, discoveries; the material, which, through analysis, had to be rearranged, reduced, effaced in order to reveal the continuity of events. Discontinuity was the stigma of temporal dislocation that it was the historian’s task to remove from history.” (Foucault, [1969]/1989:9)

Foucault challenges traditional history by insisting that historical analysis should emphasise discontinuity rather than a serial progression. Even though Foucault himself divides history into successive periods, which he calls epistemes, he says: *“The episteme is not a general developmental stage of reason, it is a complex*

*relationship of successive displacements*" (Foucault, 1991b:55). The history of ideas or sciences should be a descriptive analysis of different transformations, rather than a list of innovations, with the play of dependencies between these transformations substituted for causality (Foucault, 1991b).

Foucault's principle of specificity advises against treating significations as preordained, as having an origin, and therefore as pre-existing and waiting to be discovered: "*we must not imagine that the world turns towards us a legible face that we would have only to decipher*" (1981:67). Instead, Foucault recommends looking at significations as something people impose on things "*a violence which we do to things*" (1981:67).

Foucault's principle of exteriority advises against searching for significations buried inside a discourse. Instead, Foucault recommends examining the conditions of possibility for a discourse.

To proceed with this doctoral research, which is to investigate the regulation of organic food production, the four methodological principles outlined above can be applied as follows. Firstly, organic food production should not be attributed to a point of creation or an origin that then becomes reified. Instead, I should investigate the events associated with organic food production. Secondly, I should not expect organic food production to have a smooth history and certainly I should not gloss over any incoherencies in its development. Accordingly, in analysing the history of organic food production, I might expect to find dissonance instead of a unified pattern of development. Thirdly, the discourse of organic is not something that was waiting to be discovered, but rather is imposed upon the rest of the world by people. Fourthly, instead of looking for meaning within a discourse of organic food

production, I should reflect on the conditions of possibility that allow such a discourse to be propagated.

#### **Four Methodological Rules: *History of Sexuality Volume 1***

In *History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, Foucault outlines the four methodological rules of immanence, continual variations, double conditioning, and the tactical polyvalence of discourses ([1976]/1988:98-102). These rules, on the whole, relate to power.

The rule of the tactical polyvalence of discourses states:

“We must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. To be more precise, we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies ... There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it ... There can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy.” (Foucault, 1976 [1988]:100-102)

Accordingly, in the empirical part of this study, organic shall be conceived as a discursive field comprising many different and accepted understandings of organic for there is no one right way of doing organic.

The rule of continual variations advises against assuming that some people have power and others do not. Accordingly, this doctoral thesis rejects the notion of power as something that is the prerogative of the few. Furthermore, regulation is not viewed as something imposed upon the majority by the minority. Self-regulation, an underlying theme of this thesis, implies that individuals have choices as to when to act through exercising power over themselves.



The rule of immanence states that one should start from local centres of power-knowledge. The rule of double conditioning affirms that instead of thinking in terms of a discontinuity or a homogeneity between the macro (strategy) and micro (tactical) levels, it is more useful instead to think of a double conditioning between macro and micro. To ease writing, Chapter 5 focuses on the macro level and Chapters 6 and 7 focus on a group of organic food producers as a local centre of power-knowledge. It is recognised, however, that neither one functions without the other and that to some extent the macro/micro divide is a false one.

### **Three Methodological Rules: *Maurice Florence* (1994)**

In Florence (1994), Foucault provides three methodological rules for examining the relations between subject and truth.

First, Foucault advises adopting a systematic scepticism towards, and henceforth circumventing as much as possible, all "*anthropological universals*" (317), particularly with claims of universal validity to do with either human nature or categorising the subject. Foucault is saying that not only should we recognise that these supposed universals vary with time and context, but we should look for their conditions of possibility. One can interrogate universals by asking how they were constituted historically.

Second, Foucault advises against studying the subject as an object of knowledge as a means of gaining knowledge. Foucault recommends that one should "*examine the concrete practices by which the subject is constituted in the immanence of a domain of knowledge*" (Florence, 1994:317).

Third, Foucault recommends using practices as the domain of analysis, or "*approaching one's study from the angle of what "was done"*" (318):

“He [*Foucault*] first studies the practices – ways of doing things – that are more or less regulated, more or less conscious, more or less goal-oriented, through which one can grasp the lineaments both of what was constituted as real... These “practices”, understood simultaneously as modes of acting and of thinking, are what provide the key to understanding a correlative constitution of the subject and the object.” (Florence, 1994:318)

For a comprehensive account of Foucault’s use of practices, refer to Chapter 3 of this thesis. Foucault recommends studying practices in order to understand two fundamentals; firstly, for those trying to control what was established as real, what it was that was real; and secondly, the way in which those people trying to control what was established as real constituted themselves as subjects who were able to know, analyse and modify the real (Florence, 1994:318). Here, Foucault seems to be referring to the two fundamental and reciprocal modes of objectivisation and subjectivisation that were outlined in Chapter 3. To recap, objectivisation cannot operate without subjectivisation and vice versa. The two modes underpin all practices to produce truth games.

In his biography, Foucault goes on to say that the objectivisation of the subject implies power relations that he recommends analysing:

“It is a matter of studying the devices and techniques that are used in different institutional contexts to act on the behavior of individuals taken separately or in groups; to shape, direct, and modify their behavior, to impose limits on their inaction, or to inscribe it within overall strategies that are thus multiple in their forms and zones of enactment.” (Florence, 1994:318)

These power relations characterise the way that humans “govern” one another. By analysing these power relations, one can find out how the subject is objectivised

through the use of certain patterns of “governance”. It is worth recalling too that an individual can also judge her/himself through acting simultaneously as subject and object. It is anticipated that the organic producer as subject self-regulates through making ethical decisions about which practices make her/him organic but can also be regulated and objectivised as “an organic producer” by other organic stakeholders including other organic producers. In turn, an organic producer is expected to regulate and objectivise the organic-ness of other organic producers by comparing her/his own organic practices with the practices of others.

### **Genealogy/Archaeology as a Methodology**

Introducing *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault identifies the work as a history of the present, rather than “*a history of the past in terms of the present*” (1977:30-1). The aim is to enhance understanding of the present through an understanding of the past. A history of the present uses history critically to “*make intelligible the possibilities in the present*” (Dean, 1994:21). Through genealogy, history is used as a way of diagnosing the present and not as a way of finding out how the present has emerged from the past (Kendall & Wickham, 1999:4). Instead of revalidating that which is already known, a genealogical analysis offers us “*new clues about ourselves*” (Procacci, 1991:152).

A genealogy is a political tool for it “*allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tactically today*” (Foucault, 1980a:83). It is an emancipatory attempt to free historical knowledges from their subjection to scientific knowledge and is based on reactivating local or subjugated knowledges (Foucault, 1980a). Genealogies are anti-sciences, concerned with promoting knowledges that are opposed “*to the effects of the centralising powers which are*



*linked to the institution and functioning of an organised scientific discourse within a society such as ours*" (Foucault, 1980a:84).

Genealogy analyses those objects that are necessary components of our reality (Dean, 1994:33). Genealogy is a critical ontology of ourselves (Kendall & Wickham, 1999:30). A genealogy is a way of discovering how the human constructs that we work with today are brought into being. Through a genealogy, one traces the family tree of a human construct from birth to the present through studying new lines that are created, lines that die out and things coming together that were not obviously connected before. Knights & Morgan (1991), for example, use genealogy to locate the diverse set of conditions that make possible a discourse of corporate strategy:

"This discourse has its own historical conditions of possibility; it embodies particular ways of seeing organizations, subjects and societies. It is embedded in particular sets of social relations. It has particular truth effects which are disciplinary on subjects and organizations. It is reproduced in specific sets of power-knowledge relations and it meets resistances at particular points." (255)

Other applications of Foucault's genealogical analysis include the history of statistics (Hacking, 1991), and the genesis of the cost and management accounting practices that underpin US managerialism (Hoskin and Macve, 1988).

Archaeology, on the other hand, investigates the set of rules which "*at a given period and for a given society*" define what is sayable, which utterances are incorporated and which are repressed, how a discursive formation constrains memory, what is reactivated from discourses from previous epochs or foreign cultures, who has access to a discourse, and how the struggle for control of a discourse is conducted (Foucault, 1991b:59).

Now, whilst many authors try and draw a dividing line between genealogy and archaeology, Kendall & Wickham do not: *"A lot can be gained by keeping archaeology and genealogy together"* (1999:31). Genealogy focuses on the processual nature of discourse, whilst archaeology takes more of a snapshot (Kendall & Wickham, 1999). Clearly, Foucault alludes to using the two together: *"This analysis of desiring man is situated at the point where an archaeology of problematisations and a genealogy of practices of the self intersect"* (1984a:13).

Together, genealogy and archaeology provide a way of understanding the ways in which systems of truth are established and reproduced. To some extent, genealogy and archaeology represent the diachronic and the synchronic respectively. In Chapter 5 of this thesis, I investigate the regulation of organic through a combination of genealogy and archaeology.

### **How I Conducted a Genealogy/Archaeology**

To gain familiarity with events in the farming sector, I subscribed to *Farmers Weekly* during the first three years of doctoral study. *Farmers Weekly* alerted me to current trends in both organic and non-organic farming and directed me towards first-hand sources available on the internet, including published reports and literature relating to new and changing legislation. CAP reform in particular, initiated in 2005, represented the most fundamental agricultural reform since the 1947 Agriculture Act.

I began by focusing on two major pieces of legislation: the 1947 Agriculture Act and 2005 CAP reform. To do so, I referred to existing documentation in the form of books published by agricultural historians, legislative documentation, and the National Archives ([2002]/2004)). Next, to write a genealogy/archaeology of organic

farming and its regulation, I used texts written by the so-called “organic pioneers” and also referred to books and journal articles published by academic writers who focus on organic agriculture. Finally, I examined how the organic farmer is regulated through distribution of organic produce.

In all, I used reports published by government and parliamentary bodies including the Advisory Committee on Organic Standards (ACOS), the All Party Parliamentary Small Shops Group, the British Standards Institute (BSI), the Cabinet Office, the Commission for Rural Communities, the Commission of the European Communities, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Select Committee (ETRA), the European Union (EU), the Home Office, the Labour Party, the Office of Fair Trading (OFT), and the Office of Public Sector Information. Of the organic certifying bodies, the Soil Association maintains an extensive on-line library of documentation as well as publishing regular reports on the state of the organic market. I also used the Soil Association certification standards as a source.

Other sources include the websites of the US-based Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and National Organic Program, Biodynamic Agricultural Association (BDAA) certification body, Demeter International certification body, Elm Farm Research Centre, Henry Doubleday Association (HDRA), International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), Intentional Communities, Organic Farmers and Growers (OF&G) certification body, Resurgence, Summerhill School, UK Co-housing Network, US Environmental Protection Agency, and World Wide Opportunities On Organic Farms (WWOOF). I also accessed the websites of the following environmental pressure and campaigning groups: Friends of the Earth (FoE), Greenpeace, Pesticide Action Network UK (PAN UK), and World Wildlife Fund (WWF).



In addition, I interviewed two commercial organic producers and chatted to others at farmers markets. I spent one morning talking with and interviewing an Inspection Manager at one of the certification bodies. During the research period, I chatted to the owner of the organic shop I visit twice monthly to do my shopping.

### **Ethnography as a Methodology**

Whilst much of Foucault's empirical work refers to first-hand source document archives, he did engage in ethnographic-type research. In the 1950s, he worked in a psychiatric hospital for three years, following which he wrote a history of the practices he found there in *Madness and Civilization*; he also worked as a psychologist in a French prison (Martin, [1982]/1988). Foucault's methodological rules and principles, however, do not identify ethnographical research as a methodology. Therefore, I turn to the work of other authors for assistance.

Ethnography is a methodology for "*the study of human beings in social interaction*" (Wolcott, 1995:19). An ethnographic case study provides a means of conducting fieldwork inside an organising group of individuals. Fieldwork is a curiosity about the Other: "*about people who construct their world differently from the way I construct mine*" (Czarniawska, 1998:21). Through participant observation, the researcher assumes the role of an organisational member (Czarniawska, 1998). Ethnography attempts to consider things from the insider's point of view and enables the researcher to produce a "thick description" from one particular site (Geertz, 1973). Nonetheless, time alone does not guarantee breadth, depth, accuracy of information (Wolcott, 1995:78) or insight (Hammersley, 1992). Observation and participant observation are not sufficient and require supplementing through interviews: "*I do interviews to elicit standard accounts of a practice of interest to me. I do observations to contrast these accounts with nonstandard ones (novel*

*readings) and to use the gap between the two as a source of knowledge"* (Czarniawska, 1998:30). In this way, according to Czarniawska (1998), the material collected via interviews and that collected via observations complement each other. Hence, one way to achieve triangulation within a single case study is to compare research findings obtained from using different methods such as interviewing and participant observation. Another way is to conduct a longitudinal study in which one interviews the same person twice, leaving a gap between interviews.

Ethnography involves more than collecting data:

"A crucial aspect of fieldwork lies in recognizing when to be unmethodical, when to resist the potentially endless task of accumulating data and to begin searching instead for underlying relationships and meanings" (Wolcott, 1995:13, emphasis in original).

Ethnographic fieldwork allows researchers to develop a sense of "*what, when, and under what circumstances it is appropriate to ask something and when it is better to remain quiet*" (Wolcott, 1995:102). The researcher is able to review constantly what s/he is looking for and refocus attention to what is actually going on (Wolcott, 1995:97).

Ethnographic case studies have become popular with researchers studying culture in organisations. Rather than study culture, I intend to investigate how individuals regulate themselves and others in a context within which there are different permutations of organic. Examples of good ethnographic research using Foucault as a theoretical framework are rare but can be found in Grey's account of the propagation of life assurance practices through self-help and New Right discourses (1992), Barker's study of a small manufacturing company's implementation of team

working (1993), Casey's account of an attempt to implement culture change (1999), and McDonald's study of an English Primary Care Trust (2004).

## **Reflexivity**

The main risk in an ethnographic study is often said to be that of the researcher losing detachment and becoming too involved to be impartial. The argument is that in "going native" one will lose one's analytical judgement through over-identification (Coffey, 1999). Coffey argues back that the involvement of the researcher in the field is a strength rather than a weakness of ethnography. Indeed, getting close to the field might actually enhance the research that is produced:

"The interconnectedness of researcher, researched, social actors and significant others is the very essence of fieldwork. To a large extent the quality of the research experience (for all involved) and the quality of the research data is dependent upon the formation of relationships and the development of an emotional connection to the field." (56-7)

The important thing is to be aware of one's involvement. Barratt (2003b) suggests that we take from Foucault the importance of questioning continually our values and commitments, be prepared for self-criticism, be willing to change, to be tolerant of different values, to be flexible, and never stand still in one's own self-confidence (199-200).

## **Being One's Self**

"The whole point and punch line about anthropology itself, which I have tried to convey in this review article, is that it is research from the mind and the heart, which relies upon the practice of both reflexivity and subjectivity to guard against the excesses of either." (Bate, 1999:1170)



Coffey (1999) warns against adhering to the strategic recommendations of methodological textbooks to self-manage field roles for the purposes of collecting data. She is critical of those who advocate that ethnographic researchers engage in impression management techniques, citing Hammersley & Atkinson ([1983]/1995). Bryman & Bell also recommend engaging in impression management: "*Being an organizational ethnographer involves managing the impressions others have of you by developing a role that helps you to blend into a particular organizational setting*" (2003:327).

Traditionally, therefore, ethnographic accounts have divorced the self from the field:

"The ethnographer embarks on a progression from ignorant stranger to wise scholar, treading a path through self-alienation to self-enlightenment. The denial of the self has been received as epistemological necessity. At the same time, fieldwork has been taken as a setting and a context for personal growth. These contrastive aspects of the fieldwork experience have not, as might have been thought, disproved the distance between the self and the field. Instead the dichotomy has been reinforced and maintained. The two processes of ethnographic fieldwork and self-development have been seen as related though separate." (Coffey, 1999:21)

On the contrary, Coffey advocates that the self should be written into ethnographic research and this is something that I should like to do myself for it seems a more honest way to proceed. For the main part of my research, I am conducting an ethnography into a group of organic food producers who live and work together. Hence, I shall not only be visiting individuals at work but also in their own homes. I wish to interview people and document their truths and so I think it is important to gain their trust in order to avoid them either telling me what they think I want them to hear or refraining from telling me truths because I come across as false.

According to Coffey, prolonged fieldwork entails developing rapport and the ethnographic research relationship is more personal than other qualitative research relationships. It is not just a matter of being polite and courteous. Presenting field relations as good helps to validate the research. It is simplistic to think that, by avoiding friendship, the researcher will be able to remain critical:

“The essence of the ethnographic enterprise is predicated on shared understandings and reciprocal arrangements. Good ethnographic practice, data collection and analyses rely upon genuine empathy, trust and participation.”  
(1999:47)

One ethnographic researcher who writes her self into her research through a range of roles is Kondo (1990), who relates how the identities of the people she lived and worked with are shifting and complex. Kondo argues that it was essential that she participated enthusiastically in the lives of her friends and co-workers to produce meaning. The Japanese people responded to an American Japanese woman carrying out research in Japan by trying to make her as Japanese as possible. Kondo therefore challenged other people's senses of her identity, which became fragmented into Japanese and American elements. Nevertheless, while keen to immerse my self in the current research study, a fragmentation of identity is something that I would wish to avoid.

## **How I Conducted an Ethnography of Practices**

### **Introduction**

Historical accounts of organic farming tend to focus on organic ideas rather than on practices (Frost and Wachter, 2003). In addition, much of the current literature on

organic food production focuses at the macro level of institutions, standards development, and corporate involvement, rather than at the micro-level of practices.

I decided to carry out an ethnography of practices at an organic farming cooperative community, which I shall now refer to as Greenfields, using a mix of observation, participant observation, interviewing, and document analysis of artefacts including blackboards, notice boards, books, notebooks, and minutes of meetings. I predicted that practices could be categorised into three types:

- Organic farming practices, including how the soil is fertilised, and how pests and weeds are avoided.
- Practices involved in negotiating what these organic farming practices should be.
- Practices of writing, recording, measuring, classifying.

A further set of practices, inspection practices and distribution practices, was more relevant to commercial producers.

### **Why Study an Organic Farming Community?**

Between formulating the research question and carrying out data collection, I discovered that all farmers who produce organic food for sale must be certified by an organic certification body. In other words, all commercial organic farmers have to follow codified rules and are inspected yearly. Therefore, a non-commercial community of organic producers provides a unique research site for focusing on the individual and collective self-regulation of organic food production through practices by a diverse group of people without formal rules to follow. Since farming provides



food for members and is not sold outside, Greenfields is not obliged to follow the rules laid down by one of the organic certification bodies.

Additionally, an organic community producing food for its own consumption seemed to offer a lot of benefits over researching individual organic producers. Since there was a number of adults located in one place, Greenfields presented the prospect of finding heterogeneity within one site. I was interested in how community members organise their organic farming practices, how they reach agreement and resolve conflicts, whether some producers might consider themselves to be more organic than others, and how newcomers integrate their organic thoughts and practices with the rest of the community. There are no formal criteria for joining and therefore no requirement to have farmed before either organically or non-organically. I anticipated differing levels of knowledge and experience about organic farming practices.

I decided to begin data collection at Greenfields through a pilot study. If the pilot study suggested that Greenfields had good potential for answering the research question, then I would extend the study into an ethnography at the site.

### **Gaining Access**

I drew up a Research Plan and liaised with two key contacts at Greenfields with whom I had previously had some irregular contact through my partner. They circulated the Research Plan and put forward a proposal for me to carry out research at the next Farm Meeting. The proposal was accepted and so my access was negotiated. A confirmatory email from my key contacts listed seven contacts.

I rang up one of my key contacts who confirmed that Greenfields residents do indeed have different levels of commitment to an organic ethos. A further interesting

point made was that Greenfields is used as a role model of a successful organisational model by new start-up communities. This sounded interesting in terms of potential empirical contribution to organisation theory, but for now I was focusing on self-regulation through organic farming practices and associated practices such as decision-making. At the time, I did not know enough to appreciate the impact that the organisational set-up would have on my research.

The key contacts invited my partner and I to a communal meal to meet community members, who were friendly and approached me to talk enthusiastically about events at Greenfields. I found out that residents really like their food which was delicious and a fore-taste of what was to come during the research. My assumption that Greenfields was not certified by an organic certification body was disrupted: I found out that Greenfields used to be registered with the Soil Association and recently there had been some discussion about joining again. However, with this additional knowledge, it became feasible that I might be able to restrict my research to Greenfields as a single research site because it was now clear that self-regulating to rules, or codification, was an absent presence.

### **Pilot Study**

I had been granted access by the community to go in and research how they regulated, or self-regulated, their organic farming practices. But, of course, I still had to negotiate individual access. At the communal meal to which my partner and I were invited, the one remaining founder asked me for an interview, so I decided to carry out one week's empirical study during Warwick University's Reading Week, November 2004, as a pilot study. I spent most of the first day with the founder who gave me a history of the start-up and a guided tour of the house and farm. I found out that although I had been granted access, arranging interviews was not going to

be particularly easy. Every adult community member worked a substantial number of hours each week inside the community and, additionally, some people worked full-time outside the community.

During the pilot study, I interviewed five community members, including a founder and four relative newcomers. I arranged these interviews through wandering round observing and “bumping into” the people who I subsequently interviewed. So, although I interviewed five people during the week, those people are not particularly representative for one person has been at the community longest and the others had joined in the past year. Also, two people were married to each other. Nevertheless, even with only five interviewees, organic-ness was diverse. The pilot study provided a very useful start to the research and an opportunity to make the study longitudinal in that I could come back nine months later and interview some of those newer residents again to see if anything had changed. Also, having joined within the last year, newcomers had good memories of why they joined.

Interviews were supported by observation and providing advice on CAP Reform and re-joining the Soil Association. I found out that this group of organic producers is trying to farm as organically “as they can” without becoming Soil Association members. Nevertheless, at the same time, they have been debating whether or not to join the Soil Association. I had lunch with the Farm Chair who involved me in advising on the transition through CAP reform, which I had been reading up on through *Farmers Weekly* and which was not yet fully finalised. This had bearing on the Community's discussions about whether or not to join the Soil Association again because, with CAP reform, the Environmental Stewardship Scheme pays twice as much to certified organic farmers as it does to non-organic farmers.



## **Intervening Period**

In the intervening period between pilot study and the most intensive part of the data collection, I returned to the community periodically to participate in work gangs and observe two Farm meetings. My partner and I also participated in the fun atmosphere of a social event, which was a Ceilidh.

I transcribed all five interviews and analysed the pilot study data which was by no means exhausted. I decided that this organic farming community had potential to provide comprehensive data for a full-fledged doctoral thesis. In the meantime, I interviewed a commercial organic producer. I gained a few insights, particularly into the similarities between organic and non-organic farming and differences between different types of organic farming. However, overall, the interview was dominated by talk of agribusiness squeezing out the small family farms, which is what happened when I interviewed another commercial organic producer three years before. Whilst this also constituted an interesting research study, I decided upon reflection that the community offered more potential for answering the research question of how is organic regulated.

To further all-round academic development, this intervening period was also taken up with teaching undergraduates and with writing research papers for conferences.

## **Main Data Collection**

During the summer of 1995, I carried out the main part of the data collection. I worked for a week on the World Wide Opportunities On Organic Farms (WWOOF) scheme, during which I worked, lived, socialised, and slept at the community. WWOOF is a world-wide exchange network through which volunteers are recruited to help out short-term or long-term on organic farms in return for bed, board and

practical experience. Generally, the interviews offered insights far beyond observation, participant or otherwise. However, living at the community ensured that events happened in my life that helped me to empathise with what some interviewees said and also to ask more probing questions. Events from my own experience helped me to understand the experiences of my interviewees. I also got a little more used to the information-sharing and instruction practices written on the blackboards and pinboards and came to realise how much thought must go into keeping up to date with things to do with farming and the organic garden.

Living on-site also made me more accessible to those Greenfields residents who wanted an interview. Altogether, I interviewed half the adults and some of them twice. Of the others, several were away most of the time working in London, some said “No” to an interview, and others seemed to live relatively privately and not mix much in community life. One resident informed me that not everyone would agree to be interviewed through a desire to keep community life out of the media. As Bryman & Bell (2003) contend, ethnographers are often constrained to gathering information from whatever sources are available to them: *“Ethnographers have to ensure that they gain access to as wide a range of individuals relevant to the research question as possible, so that many different perspectives and ranges of activity are the focus of attention”* (329).

I cannot contend that the sample I interviewed is fully representative. I quote below from my field notes:

Community members are very busy. Off on holiday (now school holidays). Having babies. And, of course, with school holidays, they'll be child-caring all week. It is easier to interview the childless older people – but is this a skewed sample?

However, amongst those interviewed, there was sufficient disparity to avoid making general claims. To achieve closure, I followed the advice of another resident, and deposited a note in the pigeonhole of every house unit with my contact details; inviting people to get in touch if they wanted an interview and had not already done so.

Interviews were semi-structured but the questions changed as the research progressed for, as I found out something significant, I would try to find out more in subsequent interviews by adapting the set of questions. One quandary was whether to allow people from the same household to be interviewed together, but I fitted in with what community members asked for. It did bother me slightly beforehand that if one partner asked for a joint interview, the other partner might feel obliged to agree and therefore present more of a united front than if interviewed separately. As it happened, two sets of partners decided on a joint interview and, in both cases, the conversation was lively without any suggestion of one partner being silenced in any way.

Another quandary was whether to interview children and young people under 18, but none of these came forward and the oldest were very young teenagers and appeared to have no responsibilities, although many helped their parents farm from a very young age. Interviews with young people at the community should perhaps be reserved for another day with a different research topic such as a study of children growing up in a community.



## **Analysing the Data**

### **Introduction**

This section reflects on the data analysis part of the research study, including thoughts on writing in the self and details of how I coded the data and chose what to include as verbatim quotations. I also comment on the concepts of validity, reliability and generalisability.

### **Writing in the Self**

Following Coffey (1999), I decided to locate myself at times in the text of the data analysis, but to refrain from attempting to interleave an ethnography and autobiography. For I cannot appreciate how referring to the effects of weeding during participant observation (hot, sweaty, cramped legs, no shelter from sun, no hunger, and so on) contributes greatly to the research. At times in the analysis, though, I shall draw on my fieldnotes to illustrate an important point.

### **Coding**

I fully transcribed each interview transcript, except for a long interview with a certification body Inspection Manager which I transcribed in part. I used Microsoft Word to type up the interviews in tables, leaving a column free for coding. Hence, by the time I was ready to commence coding, I had gained familiarity with the contents of the interviews. If I had asked someone else to transcribe the interviews, I would have saved a lot of time but I would have compromised the anonymity I promised interviewees and I would be beginning coding with a blank slate.

Coding was a methodical procedure that involved going through interview transcripts and field notes several times. It also proved to be somewhat of a black art, drawing on resources of intuition and gut feeling that are hard to describe:

“The imaginative, artful and reflexive aspects of data analysis are far less easy to codify, describe and teach.” (Coffey, 1999:138)

I found that I could draw up a list of codes as I went through one interview transcript but then these had to be re-jigged as I went through the next transcript in order to produce one set of codes for both transcripts. This process occurred for all subsequent transcripts. I kept a Word document of codes and sub-codes that I changed constantly as I went through. I also typed in codes against interview text in the Word document for each transcript. Hence, I had to go through interviews several times to adjust the codes assigned to pieces of transcript. Once the list of codes was relatively stable, I coded up the field notes and went through all the transcripts again to adjust them to the finalised list. But, there is really no such thing as a finalised list. Even as I was in the process of writing up the empirical chapters, new analyses occurred to me.

The data was extremely rich and opened up many opportunities for analysis along Foucault's themes, identified in Chapter 3. My part was to link what I saw and heard to the theory outlined in Chapter 3.

### **Writing in Verbatim Quotations**

The issue of selecting verbatim quotations from interview transcripts to include in the thesis is not much discussed. Recently, Corden & Sainsbury addressed this gap through an ESRC-funded study (2006) by asking the opinions of end-users who read research reports, referred to as “research users”. Generally, research users

agreed that researchers do not explain how they select quotations. Some research users thought quotations were most useful when they communicated something more effectively than the author might which aided the explanation (10). There was little mention of verbatim quotations empowering the research participants by giving them a voice, but rather a mistrust that the researcher might be using their words to put forward a personal agenda. Some of the research users advocated verbatim quotations for “*making a report more interesting to read, and more enjoyable and stimulating*” (15). Generally, respondees believed that researchers tidied up the quotations before writing them in, including removing ‘ums’ and ‘ers’. There was also a feeling that care should be taken over using pseudonyms.

My own take on using verbatim quotations is that, to try and get away from using interviewees as research objects, they should be allowed to talk rather than just to be talked about. Nevertheless, whilst direct quotation allows people to speak for themselves free of researcher’s interpretation, it is limited because quotations are selected by the writer rather than the research subject (Grey, 1998). I was fortunate to have access to an eloquent group of interviewees, who were capable of expressing themselves better than I could through intervention. Accordingly, I have been fairly liberal in including verbatim quotations, although sometimes I sum up the participants’ “truths” in the form of a précis. I decided too that including verbatim quotations would help to make the empirical chapters lively and interesting. Where I use verbatim quotations, I have been careful to indicate whether this is the opinion of one person, a group of people, or a more general “truth”. I did also remove the ‘ums’ and ‘urghs’. I used ‘...’ in the middle of quotations to link together two separate quotes that were close together in a transcript, or to reject a phrase that I was unable to interpret from the script, or to discard a phrase or two that was not very well expressed.



To preserve internal anonymity at Greenfields, I rejected pseudonyms because of the risk of being able to trace back through the thesis what was said by one particular respondent.

### **Validity, Reliability and Generalisability**

It is questionable whether the positivist constructs of validity, reliability, and generalisability are legitimate constructs by which to evaluate the contribution to be made from an ethnographic case study.

Validity is concerned with whether a researcher has measured what the research purports to measure. The ethnographic researcher cannot prove this type of validity. Wolcott (1995:169) claims that, more recently, validity has come to mean the correspondence between the research and the real world. However: I align myself with Parker who contends: "*I do not want to claim that my 'findings' are 'true', or that I have insights that are somewhat inaccessible to my organizational respondents*" (2000:235). Equating an ethnographic case study with some kind of reality makes the researcher open to criticism from social constructionists, who claim that all knowledge is a construction (Hammersley, 1992:143). It is a difficult process to claim that one sort of knowledge is more valuable than another, particularly when, from the postmodernist point of view, multiple realities are a reality in themselves. For Hammersley (1992:67), validity refers to "*the accuracy with which a description of particular events (or a set of such descriptions) represents the theoretical category that it is intended to represent and captures the relevant features of these events*". Rather than trying to achieve validity from a positivist perspective, then, I attempt to relate my research findings to the theory.

According to Czarniawska (1998), validity cannot be established by comparing our utterances with their object: "*Words cannot be compared to worlds*" (69), but only by comparison with other utterances; validation practices then are checking texts against other texts. Accordingly, I chose during analysis to work out whether what was being said was a majority view or a minority view.

Reliability is a quality, valued in laboratory work, that is measured by the potential of the research to replicate the results on other occasions. But ethnographical research is not necessarily replicable (Grey, 1998). For ethnographic studies, reliability is an unrealistic goal because of the inability of the researcher to control the setting. The ethnographic researcher would not carry out more than one case study just to try and replicate the results of the first case study. However, just because reliability cannot be proved, does not indicate necessarily that the results are unreliable. Czarniawska (1998) is highly critical of the concept of reliability, which she says is often said to be achieved through what is actually conformity in that the researchers conform to dominant rules: "*institutionalized research practices tend to produce similar results*" (70). Marshall & Rossman (1995:146) advise that by keeping well-organised and thorough notes and a journal or log that records design decisions and the rationale behind them, a researcher is allowing others to inspect their procedures and decisions, enabling a re-analysis of the data. I, however, have promised anonymity to research participants and cannot permit open access to fieldnotes, journals, and interview transcripts.

Generalisability refers to relevance for generating theory, so that the results of the research can be transferred to another context. The ethnographic researcher is not concerned with applying research findings to other contexts. Generalisability comes from a belief that observation can lead to formulating general laws and implies that the researcher wishes to predict outcomes, which is a positivist stance. In a

qualitative study, generalising is problematic. Ethnographic research is not conducive to extracting a few variables in an attempt to generalise from one situation to another. Instead, a fieldworker looks at how the object of study fits into the larger scheme of things (Wolcott, 1995:174). Rather than offering generalisation, a single case study can make a contribution to knowledge, by adding to other data or to a larger issue.

Nevertheless, as an ethnographer researcher, I should be prepared to defend the research findings presented in this study against concerns expressed by others. Above all, I should strive to be reflexive. As a reflexive ethnographic researcher, I should point out under what limitations I offer an interpretation of the real world and how I have been selective in choosing what to study, how to study and what data to use in the analysis.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has elaborated on the methodology used for empirical investigation into the research question “How is organic regulated?”. The remainder of this thesis analyses the regulation of organic-ness through the organising practices of food production within the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 3 and the methodological framework presented in the current chapter. Regarding Foucault's methodological rules, I have not made a deliberate effort to implement them for they are complex and would detract from the main focus of the research study. Evidently, Foucault wrote these methodological statements retrospectively in order to reposition the historical work he had done already (Dean, 1994:14). I envisage, instead, that I have partly absorbed them so that they have some impact on my thinking and on the work that is produced in this thesis.



Following Foucault, it is important to understand the past in order to make sense of the present. Accordingly, Chapter 5 provides a historical context by engaging in genealogy/archaeology to conduct a history of our organic present, including very recent history that was in the making during the research study. An attempt is made to uncover the different strands of our organic history, unlike previous attempts that tend to focus on one particular strand such as the Soil Association. In so doing, the archaeological part of the methodology examines the organic discourse “as a *multiplicity of discursive elements*” (Foucault, 1976 [1988]:100) at any one time in history. Chapters 6 and 7 apply ethnography to a micro study of organic food producers. Chapter 6 examines the truth games about organic that are grounded in the subjectivities of farmers at an organic cooperative farming community. Chapter 7 examines the self-regulatory practices associated with coordinating organic farming at a single site that embodies a multiplicity of organic discursive elements.

## **5 Genealogy/Archaeology: Organic and (Self-) Regulation**

### **Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to combine genealogy and archaeology in providing a historical context to the emergence of organic and its regulation. To begin, regulation in agriculture generally is considered with a particular focus on two significant but very different pieces of legislation: the 1947 Agriculture Act and 2005 CAP Reform. Then, a short review of pesticides is included before moving on to conduct a genealogy/archaeology of organic farming and its regulation. The regulation and self-regulation of organic farming is analysed. Foucault's concepts of a code-oriented and ethics-oriented moralities are used to explore commitment to organic farming as opposed to simply following organic standards. Finally, a look is taken at how the distribution of organic food is regulated by the major retailers and at the alternative distribution modes with which organic producers are engaging.

### **Modern Farming Policy and Regulation**

#### **1947 Agriculture Act**

Large-scale state intervention in agriculture began at the end of World War II (WW2). Previously, state intervention had operated outside wartime on a small-scale only; for example, by implementing mechanisms to guarantee prices for wheat and by establishing marketing boards. Until WW2, the accountability expected from farmers was minimal. At the early twentieth century, the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries required farmers only to write down crop acreage and number of stock on a simple census form and report diseases found in farm animals (Winnifrith, 1962). During WW2, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food (MAF)

appointed 100 and more War Agricultural Executive Committees (WAECs), each with a number of sub-committees (Wilt, 2001). These committees enabled the state to assume far-reaching control from the outset of the war (Self and Storing, 1962). Committee members had the right to inspect farmland and buildings and the power to dispossess "*recalcitrant or inefficient farmers*"; they also "*worked with farmers*" to determine "*the type and amount of crops and livestock they would produce*" (Wilt, 2001:186). Under state control, farmer prosperity increased (Self and Storing, 1962). By the end of WW2, farmers were willing to concede themselves to state control in return for a full system of guaranteed prices (Britton, 1990).

The 1947 Agriculture Act made permanent the measures taken during WW2. The act propagated a discourse of "maximum production" with its accompanying discourses of "efficiency" and "stability" (Skinner, 2003). A period of prolonged agricultural intensification followed. The munitions and chemicals industries that manufactured munitions, nerve gas and explosives during WW2 switched to supplying the agriculture sector with machinery, nitrate fertilisers and pesticides. Farmers were directed to achieve optimum yields. MAF operated a piece of bureaucratic machinery resembling a grammatocentric Panopticon that utilised normalisation and surveillance practices through farm visits, writing and record-keeping (Skinner, 2003).

During WW2, information had been collected and written down during visits to farms and holdings of five acres and more, as part of the National Farm Survey (1940-3) with the short-term aim of increasing food production and the longer-term purpose "*of providing data that would form the basis of post-war planning*" (National Archives, [2002]/2004)). The data was obtained through inspection and interview on site by other farmers who classified how farmers and landowners on each holding were performing as A (well), B (fairly well), or C (badly). The gradings referred "to



*the management condition of the farm, i.e. how a farmer managed his resources*" (National Archives, [2002]/2004)). Subsequent to the 1947 Agriculture Act, MAF acted upon this information and also carried out ongoing inspections to decide whether landowners and land occupiers were up to the job of farming efficiently (Skinner, 2003). In the first 10 years of the 1947 Agriculture Act, 6,765 applications for notice to quit were issued and 934 applications were made for a certificate of bad husbandry (Self & Storing, 1962:187).

The intensification of agriculture to achieve high yields continues to this day with the aid of artificial fertilisers to enrich the soil and pesticides to remove pests and weeds. Sixty years after the 1947 Agriculture Act, the efficiency discourse continues to be an important imperative for the farming industry, as can be witnessed by regular references to "efficiency" and its variants in the farmers weekly journal *Farmers Weekly*. Through subjecting themselves to a discourse of efficiency, farmers carry out certain farming practices that result in a greater industrialisation of agriculture. Since the introduction of the 1947 Agriculture Act, the agricultural landscape has changed to bigger and fewer fields, and larger farms, with longer supply chains and intensive animal units that take advantage of economies of scale. Practices to increase yields include the use of pesticides and "artificial" fertilisers, rearing animals in intensive factory units, breeding animals to be bigger, and using growth hormones to encourage animals to grow bigger and in shorter time so that they can be culled and sold on for food as soon as possible after birth. The following extracts from a *Farmers Weekly* article illustrate that the drive to increase productivity and efficiency continues today:

"Selecting bulls for growth rate and muscling means calves grow into better finished animals, helping to increase returns ... Using an easy-calving beef sire would reduce labour requirements and could lead to improved production ... Additionally,

cows should be easier to get back in calf again, helping to keep calving intervals low ... Selecting for gestation length will also help, because a shorter gestation length will increase the number of productive days cows have within the herd.” (Padfield, 2006)

In Foucault's terms, being subject to non-organic and its discourse of efficiency means that these are the practices farmers think they have to do. Objectivisation of the good farmer in the 1940s as using the land efficiently and producing good yields produced new subjectivities of what it is to be a farmer. Correspondingly, the body becomes an object and a target of power: *“Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)”* (Foucault, 1977:138). Not only is the human body capable of being mastered but so are the bodies of animals to obtain greater amounts of food. Farming Today (21 September 2006), reporting from the Dairy Event 2006, discusses the case of milk cattle bred for leanness over the past 20 years, making them more prone physiologically to injury and mastitis. Internal functions of the cow's body can be manipulated to produce higher yields. The Dairy Event website advertises the Realistic Agri stand in Cattle Shed 2 at the Dairy Event Show 2006 which visitors are encouraged to go to and *“find out how to make an extra £52/cow in improved milk yield and milk quality by including the raw material conditioner Bioproton in the ration”*.

For the agriculture sector, CAP reform provides the most significant legislation since the 1947 Agriculture Act.

## **CAP Reform**

The European Economic Community (EEC) was established in 1958 by treaty between six European countries and, in 1967, joined two smaller treaty

organisations to form the European Community (EC). In 1973, Britain became a member of the EC. In 1993, when the Maastricht Treaty came into force, the EC became the European Union (EU).

In response to food shortages, the EEC established a CAP in 1962 to regulate the production, trade and processing of agricultural products and set common price levels. An intervention price for produce was set lower than a target price. The EEC was liable to buying anything offered to it at the intervention price to provide a glut to meet next year's shortage. By the 1970s/1980s, surpluses such as the infamous "butter mountains" prompted reform of the CAP policy<sup>1</sup>. Milk quotas were introduced in 1982, followed by the 1992 McSharry reforms that brought in a number of measures including compulsory set-aside for arable crops. By 1995, direct payments were administered in England by an Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS), set up after the 1992 reforms as an anti-fraud measure, and submitting farmers to intense form-filling through having to submit "*an annual application providing details of their farmed land on a field-by-field basis*" (Gilg, 1995:53). At the turn of the century, Agenda 2000 continued the McSharry reforms by reducing intervention prices further and increasing direct payments.

A Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the Agenda 2000 framework decoupled the link between support payments and production, resulting in the current CAP reform that has been implemented individually by member states according to a number of options. In England, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), which in 2001 replaced the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries (MAFF), was responsible for implementing CAP reform. In the rest of the UK, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland are administered separately by the Department for Environment, Planning and Countryside (DEPC), the Scottish Executive Environment & Rural Affairs Department (SEERAD), and the Department



of Agriculture & Rural Development Northern Ireland (DARDNI) respectively. DEFRA decided to implement decoupling by phasing in a flat rate area payment over eight years from 2005 to 2012. During that period, payments are shifting from individual historic payments, calculated as the average of the last three of the farm's IACS payments for food production, to a Single Farm Payment (SFP) based on number of hectares and region and taking into account the Severely Disadvantaged Areas (SDAs). The intention is that by 2012 farmers will only produce food if the market demands but, even if there is no satisfactory market for produce, they continue to receive the SFP. The SFP pays farmers for land management rather than for food production. To qualify for SFP, farmers must meet cross-compliance requirements for maintaining all their farmed area in Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC). Cross-compliance through GAEC requires land management and environment practices such as protecting stone walls from damage or removal and protecting against over-grazing. Farmers have to leave uncultivated strips of land next to hedges and ditches two metres from centre each side. To check that cross-compliance is being carried out, inspections are carried out on a small percentage of holdings <sup>2</sup>.

In addition, the Environmental Stewardship Scheme (ESS) makes extra payments to farms that collect points for management options including managing hedgerows and maintaining a soil management plan. Since 2005, ESS has replaced previous agri-environment schemes and comprises three levels. Entry level (ELS), available to all farmers, provides £30/hectare (£12/acre) per year. Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) and Organic Entry Level Stewardship (OELS) pay out £60/hectare (£24/acre) per year. Additional payments are available for top fruit organic conversion at £600/hectare for the first three years and £175/hectare for "improved land" for the first two years.

The CAP reform of 2005 marks the most momentous agricultural legislation for UK farming since the 1947 Agriculture Act. They are very different pieces of legislation. From 1947 onwards, farmers were subsidised for producing food. During the early part of the implementation of the Act, farmers were under surveillance to produce high yields, thereby contributing to agricultural intensification. Accordingly, pesticides were used in abundance to achieve these yields and hedgerows were torn down to make fields larger and more conducive to machinery use. Sixty years later, CAP reform is implementing the gradual process of subsidising farmers for taking care of the environment rather than for producing food.

### **Pesticides as “The Other” of Organic**

Pesticides is a group that includes insecticides, herbicides and nitrates<sup>3</sup>. When organic farming was first developed, pesticide use was not raised as an issue.

Richard Benson quotes his farmer father:

“ ‘There’s no end of t’ sprays that they used to come round and tell you, “Oh yes, it’s completely safe, can’t possibly do any harm” and all that, that they’ve banned now.’  
... ‘We used to slop them about like they were water and mix ‘em in t’kitchen, and now they say they were bloody poison!’ ” (Benson, 2005:103)

Although Benson goes on to say that many farmers know people who have suffered respiratory and skin diseases as a result of using pesticides, it cannot be proved whether or not synthetic chemicals are harmful to human health. The onus is on proving that pesticides are dangerous, rather than proving that they are safe. Nevertheless, groups including World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and Pesticide Action Network UK (PAN UK) campaign to raise awareness of the hazards associated with global chemical use.

WWF tests show that pesticides leave residues in the bodies of humans and animals, even after the pesticide is no longer in use, and can be passed to an unborn child through umbilical cord blood. In 2003, WWF tested the bloodstream of 155 participants for traces of organochlorines, PCBs and flame retardants. The findings (WWF, 2003) were that every participant had measurable quantities in their blood of chemicals from all three groups, including Dichloro-Diphenyl-Trichloroethane (DDT). WWF then took blood samples from three generations of seven UK families, finding that some children were contaminated by more chemicals and at a higher level than their parents and grandparents (WWF, 2004). Subsequently, WWF tested the blood of eight celebrities who were all found to be contaminated by chemicals and three were contaminated with pp DDE, formed by DDT breaking down in the environment (WWF, 2005). Although polar bears live in a habitat where human activity is limited, WWF attributes traces of DDT, lindane and herbicide found in polar bears to the bears' position at the head of a food chain and also as a result of long-range pollution via atmospheric and riverine pathways (Norris et al, 2002). Furthermore, a study conducted by Greenpeace/WWF-UK (2005) concluded that hazardous chemicals, including organochlorine pesticides, are passed from mother to unborn child through umbilical cord blood.

As well as posing a potential hazard in terms of residues, pesticides are now under investigation to see whether they pose a threat to bystanders during spraying. A recent report declared the plausibility of a link between chronic ill health and exposure to pesticides by residents and bystanders through spraying and asserted that health effects reported following exposure to pesticides should be taken more seriously (Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, 2005). The report stated that the level of assurance given to the public about the safety of residents and bystanders exposed potentially to agricultural pesticides is not robustly founded in



scientific evidence (107). The report recommended the introduction of buffer zones alongside residential property (110) and prior notification to adjacent residents of what substances are to be sprayed, where and when (112). Subsequently, DEFRA (2006a) decided that statutory measures were not justified by the evidence found in the report and that recommendations regarding spraying practices should be implemented through self-regulation via a Voluntary Initiative.

PAN UK is researching the effects of a toxic paraquat herbicide that has no antidote, produced by Syngenta and used in developing countries by farmers and plantation workers who have little knowledge of the health risks and who cannot afford protective clothing. A recent report (Isenring, 2006) stated that frequent poisonings and recurrent fatalities from occupational exposure to paraquat continue to occur, predominantly in developing countries, concluding that paraquat should be prohibited immediately from use in developing countries where it is currently used and recommending a global ban.

The pressures placed on non-organic farms to produce the quantities that supermarkets require makes it problematic for non-organic farmers to consider reducing pesticide use. One way forward seems to be to convert to organic.

### **Genealogy/Archaeology of Organic Food Production**

#### **1900-1960: The “Organic Pioneers”**

When was the beginning of organic food production? For, Edward Said, beginning is “*making or producing difference*” ([1977]/1997:xxiii, emphases in original). Said writes: “*The designation of a beginning generally involves also the designation of a*

*consequent intention ... The beginning, then, is the first step in the intentional production of meaning*” (5, emphasis in original). Said goes on to say:

“It is this history and coherence of beginnings that I am concerned with here – specifically, the history and coherence of beginnings as a fact of written language ... beginning is doing, intending – a whole set of particular things primarily in writing or because of writing. Thought, emotion, perception are functions of the beginning act of writing.” (19, emphasis in original)

Correspondingly, I locate the beginning of organic food production in the earliest writings I can find, which is indicative of when individuals began to think about, or problematise, an issue. Clearly, though, organic farming has been practised for millennia, before pesticides and nitrogen fertilisers became widely used. The organic pioneers were concerned about soil fertility, soil conservation, and the link between food and health. Whilst pesticides were not in common use until later, some farmers were applying artificial nitrogen to the soil prior to WW2. The earliest text I have found relating to organic farming is *Farmers of Forty Centuries* (King, 1911). King travelled to China, Korea and Japan in the early 1900s to find out how farmers in those countries avoided destroying the soil's fertility when the land was farmed for many centuries without the aid of artificial fertilisers.

Biodynamics provided one of the first alternatives to modern agriculture (McMahon, 2005). In 1924, Rudolf Steiner presented a course of lectures on biodynamic agriculture, which is organic farming encompassing a spiritual dimension, entitled *Spiritual Foundations for the Renewal of Agriculture* (Steiner, [1924]/1993). These lectures provided a basis for biodynamic agriculture as it is practised today. Demeter had introduced an organic logo and a set of standards already in 1928; by

1931, approximately 1000 biodynamic farms were in existence (Demeter International website).

Later writings appear during the early 1940s with *An Agricultural Testament* (Howard, 1940), and *The Living Soil* (Balfour, 1943). Through observing agricultural practices in India, Albert Howard discovered that the soil could be preserved through composting (Reed, 2001). Soil erosion was also a big concern in the first half of the twentieth century, particularly in the US which experienced the Dust Bowl during the 1930s when periods of drought caused agricultural crops to die leaving the top soil exposed and blown away in dust storms. In 1939, Jacks & Whyte published *The Rape of the Earth: A World Survey of Soil Erosion*, an attempt to survey soil erosion that occurring through human mismanagement.

According to Heckman (2006), Walter Northbourne is credited with introducing the term “organic farming” in a book entitled *Look to the Land* (1940). This book is acknowledged elsewhere as “*generally regarded as one of the classic statements of the organic philosophy*” (Conford, 2002). However, the Soil Association (2005c:section 1.3) maintains that J.I. Rodale coined the term ‘organic’ in 1942 through publishing the magazine *Organic Gardening*.

In 1946 in the UK, the Soil Association was established. In the US in 1947, J.I. Rodale started the Soil and Health Foundation, which was the forerunner of the Rodale Institute, to promote organic farming and a connection between healthy soil and healthy people. Clearly, organic farming historians focus on the history of a particular certifying body to tell their story. Despite the existence of Demeter as a standards setting body in the 1920s, Stock (2007) considers the Soil Association to be the first major organic farming organisation. Conford (2001), Moore-Colyer (2001) and Reed (2001, 2002) locate the origins of organic farming in movements



that took place before World War II, culminating in the inauguration of the Soil Association. Reed rationalises this anomaly as follows: "*part of the implicit mission of the early [Soil] Association was to find an Organic farming, which was not biodynamic*" (Reed, 2003:241).

Reed traces the formation of the Soil Association back to three distinct groups: Haughley Research farm, the Peckham Experiment and Kinship in Husbandry (2001, 2002). Eve Balfour and Alice Debenham set up Haughley Research Farm to conduct a trial comparison of an organic farm with one using chemical fertilisers and composts (Reed, 2001:138)<sup>4</sup>. Two physicians set up the Pioneer Health Centre in 1935, aiming to improve the health of the local community in Peckham by supplying them with organic fruit and vegetables from the Centre's own farm, Home Farm (Reed, 2001:137-8). Kinship in Husbandry was begun in 1941 by Rolf Gardiner (Moore-Colyer and Conford, 2004) and has associations with racial determinism: "*Many members of the Kinship were admirers of Nazi Germany and harboured anti-Semitic, anti-urban, anti-Communist sentiments*" (Reed, 2001:136). Rolf Gardiner, together with Gerard Wallop who was to become Earl of Portsmouth, had been involved previously with the English Mistry, "*a Far Right English nationalist grouping*" (Reed, 2001:136) who had "*a re-invigorated aristocracy ... at the core of their manifesto, which they surrounded by a mixture of eugenic theorizing, social Darwinism and Lamarckism*" (Reed, 2002:486). In 1939, Gardiner and Wallop (by now Earl of Lynton) had met Walter Darré, the Nazi agriculture minister: "*To Gardiner, Darré's inspired concept of 'blood-and-soil' defined an inescapable mystical relationship between race and soil*" (Moore-Colyer, 2001:197). The Kinship in Husbandry developed the English Mistry's work into agricultural renewal through a return to a full feudal order: "*Rather than a social construction, society was an organism with certain individuals born to take the leading roles*"

(Reed, 2002:487). This programme was set out in a book *The Natural Order* produced by Massingham (1944).

Members of the first Soil Association council included Balfour, Gardiner, Massingham, the Earl of Portsmouth and Jorian Jenks (Reed, 2001). Jenks, who worked formerly as agricultural advisor to Oswald Mosley, leader of the British Union of Fascists, took on the role of Editorial Secretary and edited the Soil Association journal *Mother Earth* until his death in 1963:

“In virtually all of his postwar writings, Jenks stood shoulder to shoulder with his organicist colleagues in promoting an antimodernist philosophy embracing land reform, the paramountcy of agriculture, the subordination of mechanicism to organicism, the localization of economies and the cultivation of a consciousness of the ties of blood and soil ... Echoing his earlier writings for the BUF, Jenks regularly applauded the family homestead and ‘peasant’ farm in the postwar decades as it came increasingly under attack from modernist economists bent on amalgamation of holdings, mechanization and maximization of output per man.” (Moore-Colyer, 2004:364) <sup>5</sup>

Hence, during the 1940s and 1950s, the philosophy of organic farming was a product largely of right-wing aristocracy. Interestingly, the early organicists were concerned with promoting the small family farmer and self-sufficiency, regenerating rural areas, and cutting-down food imports, all of which are pertinent issues today. As Moore-Colyer (2004:370) says: “*To a considerable degree this idealism became the inheritance of the post-1960s organic renaissance in Britain*”.

## 1960s Onwards: Popularisation of Organic

During the 1960s and 1970s, an environmental movement emerged and also a counter-culture. The UK's first organic shop Wholefood and first vegetarian wholefood restaurant Cranks, sourced from organics, opened in Baker Street, London and Carnaby Street, London respectively during the 1960s. The first publications appeared warning of the ill-effects of the chemical pesticides used in intensive agriculture, notably *Silent Spring* (Carson, 1962). Although the book received strong criticism from scientists, Carson raised public awareness in the US and overseas of the implications of interfering in the food chain and the need to protect the environment through regulation. In 1966, the magazine *Resurgence* was introduced, publishing articles on the endangered environment, renewable energy and ecological economics (*Resurgence website*). In 1970, the magazine *Ecologist* was founded. Britain's first environmental pressure group, Friends of the Earth (FoE), was launched in 1971. In 1972, the first United Nations (UN) Conference on the Human Environment took place. During the early 1970s, Greenpeace started through a group of people in Canada undertaking voyages by ship to nuclear testing areas; by the 1980s, the activities of the Rainbow Warrior attracted increasing attention to Greenpeace (Spowers, 2002).

Until the 1970s, organic farming in the UK was represented by two main bodies: the Soil Association in the UK and Demeter. During the 1970s and 1980s, a surge in self-sufficiency and allotment gardening occurred. In 1976, John Seymour published *The Complete Book Of Self Sufficiency*, a book that promoted the idea to urbanites that one did not require a farm to be self-sufficient and that vegetables can be grown organically on a smallish plot. During 1975-8, the BBC broadcast the popular sitcom *The Good Life*, featuring a couple who turn their suburban home into a self-sufficient smallholding on which they keep animals and grow produce. The



Henry Doubleday Association (HDRA), which was started in 1954 by Soil Association member Lawrence Hills to promote organic gardening, became popular during the 1970s. In the early 1970s, WWOOF was established in the UK and has since spread worldwide as an international organiser of short-term employment on organic farms and smallholdings.

In 1972, the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) was established to act as a world-wide umbrella organisation for organisations involved with the organic movement world-wide. Eve Balfour, Mary Langham, and J.I. Rodale, amongst others, were involved in IFOAM's start-up. On the IFOAM website, the IFOAM Director for International Relations, states:

"Back in 1972 "organic" people were not only radical in its best sense really going to the "roots", but also were seen by many as marginal and eccentric. Part of the success story of the organic agriculture movement is the fact that these attitudes have changed dramatically." (Geier, 1999)

Clunies-Ross (1990) claims that the 1980s was a period of rapid transition for the organic movement in that organic farming became popularised and supermarkets began to stock organic produce. Both Clunies-Ross (1990) and Frost & Wacher (2003) negate the importance of the early organic pioneers, emphasising the role played by a new generation of organic growers during the 1970s and 1980s that led to the formation of Organic Farmers and Growers in 1975 (OF&G) and, in 1981, the Organic Growers Association (OGA) as a trade association. OGA's founder members were mostly ex-urbanite newcomers to farming who established a series of marketing cooperatives (Frost & Wacher, 2003). In 1980, the Elm Farm Research Centre formed: *"it is the UK's leading research, development and advisory institution for organic agriculture, having played a pivotal role in the*

*development of organic research, policy and standards since 1980*" (Elm Farm Research Centre website). In 1982, British Organic Farmers (BOF) broke away from the Soil Association to form a separate organisation. In 1986, a further current certification body, the Organic Food Federation (OFF), was established. In 1986, the Prince of Wales began to convert part of Highgrove Farm and Duchy Home Farm to organic and, in 1992, launched the Duchy Originals brand. In the early 1990s, with the introduction of national and EU legislation, OGA and BOF merged with the Soil Association (Frost & Wacher, 2003).

During the 1990s, organic agriculture expanded rapidly, drawing more stakeholders into the movement and extending concern to encompass pesticide residues, animal welfare and the use of non-renewable resources. Between 1993 and 2003, organically farmed English land increased almost 25 times over.

## **Regulation of Organic Food Production**

### **Certifying Bodies and Related Legislation**

Organic is ubiquitous and multifaceted. Throughout the world, there are hundreds of private organic standards; organic standards have been codified in the technical regulations of over 60 governments (IFOAM website). Organic food as an end-product cannot be distinguished easily from non-organic produce and, accordingly, the process of production is monitored through a system of regulation that provides a label to signify that the produce is organic. Each certifying body provides a set of standards to adhere to for the granting of organic status and the right to display a label.

The regulation of organic food production conducted through organic standards has been studied in New Zealand (Coombes and Campbell, 1998; Campbell and Liepins, 2001), Canada (Egri, 1994), the United States (Mansfield, 2004), Denmark (Kaltoft, 1999; 2001; Michelsen, 2001), and Sweden (Bostrom, 2006), but not comprehensively in the UK. Currently, the largest and second largest UK organic certification bodies are the Soil Association, certifying more than 70% of all UK organic produce, and OF&G, which is now a limited company. A third, the Biodynamic Agricultural Association (BDAA), is associated with Demeter. BDAA offers two certifying schemes: one that is fully biodynamic, and another for licensees who are not yet ready to apply the full biodynamic system. Generally, the organic conversion period is two years, during which producers manage their land organically but cannot label their produce as organic and therefore are unable to claim an organic premium for produce sales. For producers following the Demeter certification scheme, the conversion period is three years. Organic farmers pay annual charges to their certifying body. These charges tend to be organised along a sliding scale according to number of hectares. Since 2005 Cap Reform, an organic premium has been available through OELS <sup>6</sup>.

To recap, a set of biodynamic standards and a logo were available from Demeter as far back as 1928. In 1967, the Soil Association produced its first set of organic standards in draft format. By 1973, a subsidiary organization, the Soil Association Marketing Company Ltd, was formed to certify organic produce and the Soil Association symbol was registered as a trademark. Today, this subsidiary is known as Soil Association Certification Limited (SA Cert). The Soil Association has had a central role in the development of an organic movement for having, firstly, a large membership base which also allows them to compile statistics into a



comprehensive annual report on the organic sector and, secondly, control over the standards by which most organic producers in the UK are certified (Reed, 2004).

In 1980, IFOAM produced a set of basic international organic standards for the first time (Soil Association, 2000d:section 1.3). IFOAM's standards have no legal status in the EU today. In Europe, policy intervention in organic farming began in 1993 when EEC Council Regulation 2092/91 (EEC, 1991), a state-supervised certification system for organic products, came into force. In 1999, the EU extended EC 2092/91 to cover livestock production through EC Regulation (EC) 1804/1999 (EC, 1999). In 1987, the British Government formed the UK Register of Organic Food Standards (UKROFS) in preparation for enforcing the planned EC legislation and to monitor the UK certifying bodies (DEFRA, 2003). As well as the five UK certification bodies existing at that time, other organisations could apply to UKROFS to be an authorised certification agency. In 1990, the UKROFS standards, which were lower than those of the Soil Association, came into force (Reed, 2003:265).

The UK translates EC 2092/91 into the Organic Products Regulation 2004 (Statutory Instrument no. 1604, 2004), which is enforced by Trading Standards Officers and requires that anyone who wishes to produce organic food must first register with a certification body. EC 2092/91 also forms the basis for the Compendium of Organic Standards produced by the Advisory Committee on Organic Standards (ACOS), which replaced UKROFS in 2004. ACOS advises the government on organic standards and approves certification bodies through DEFRA <sup>7</sup>. Within the regulatory systems, there is a hierarchy of organic. The *Compendium of UK Organic Standards* (DEFRA, 2006b) provides a minimum legal standard that may be exceeded by the certifying bodies and certainly is by the Soil Association in a number of instances, resulting in the potential for different

meanings of organic. For example, the Soil Association permits far fewer birds (recommended 500; maximum 2,000) to be kept in a single house than do the UK minimum standards (12,000). Below, the Soil Association promotes itself as more organic than the EU standards and some other certifying bodies:

"The Soil Association has chosen, where appropriate, to set standards that are much better than the organic standards set by ... EU and ... DEFRA. There are other UK organic certifiers who also support better welfare for organic chickens. They include the Biodynamic Agricultural Association (Demeter), Irish Organic Farmers & Growers Association, Organic Trust, Quality Welsh Food Certification and the Scottish Organic Producers Association (SOP). They use the same or similar standards to the Soil Association." (Soil Association, 2005b)

In this text, the Soil Association is suggesting that organic practices accepted by some other certifying bodies, such as OF&G and OFF, are not as good or as organic as their own.

Since 1998, all organic certification bodies in the EU have to comply with the requirements of EN45011, a European standard specifying the structure of certification bodies. The UK implements EN45011 through the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) which assesses UK certification bodies, including organic certifying organisations, against this standard to guidelines documented by the British Standards Institute (BSI, 1998). UKAS operates through the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and accredits and provides a national service for certification, testing, inspection and calibration services of all kinds. All organic imports must be certified by bodies that comply with EN45011 or its international equivalent ISO Guide 65. For a comprehensive account of organic imports from outside the EC, see Barrett et al (2002).

The Soil Association's standards, then, are long established. Discussing audit procedures in general, Jahn et al (2005:57) comment: "*The thoroughness of the audit process often varies considerably as control procedures and occupational qualifications have not yet been sufficiently well defined*". Unlike many control procedures, though, the rules of the Soil Association are mature for they have been in existence and actively maintained since 1967. What I did learn over the research period was how well-defined the Soil Association's guidelines are. For example, in the case of hybrid farmers who operate both organic and non-organic holdings, the Soil Association has procedures to establish that the two holdings are maintained physically, financially, and operationally separate<sup>8</sup>. Of these, maintaining operational separation is the most complex and involves employing different staff for the two types of holding, operating different book-keeping records, and not growing the same variety of crop or housing the same animal species.

## **Self-Regulation**

The previous section explored the regulation of organic farmers by a certifying body that provides a set of standards to follow. In line with the general theme of this thesis, inspired by Foucault, which is that regulation and self-regulation are interdependent, this section considers how organic farmers self-regulate.

To recap from Chapter 3, Foucault's thesis undermines the notion of power as repressive and operating from the state downwards. Instead, power operates locally and is invested in individuals. Following on, Foucault's concept of governmentality is a form of management, rather than state repression, that operates at different levels. Governmentality begins with caring for the self. Once one has mastered being able to care for the self, one is capable of governmentality over others through managing a farm, teaching in a school, and so on. Through regulating



these other things, one is simultaneously regulating oneself, or self-regulating. Also, those who govern act in the service of those whom they govern rather than enforcing controls through the imposition of power.

To begin with, the organic standards were policed by the farmers themselves. According to the IFOAM website, in the early years of certification in the 1970s, farmers inspected one another on a voluntary basis. When the Soil Association produced its first set of standards in 1967, farmers were not inspected; farmers were bound by a set of rules *“that bound them to avoid a set of prohibited substances and practices, all that tied the farmer to this contract was their honour”* (Reed and Holt, 2006:5). Even today, the National Organic Program website maintains that US farmers whose gross agricultural income from organic sales does not exceed \$5,000 are exempt from certification.

Clearly, though, studies in one country cannot be used to universalise. Different nations have distinct institutional frameworks that are embodied in their national capitalisms (Morgan et al, 2005). Campbell & Liepins (2001:34) maintain that, in New Zealand, large companies have become involved in inspecting farms with organic growers *“being technically compliant producers of a specific style of product”*. In Sweden, too, Bostrom (2006) claims that the retailers and processing industries have gained a strong position by taking the initiative in issues such as labelling.

Following the 1980s surge in organic production in the UK, organic producers wanted organic certification to allow them to sell their produce commercially and, in doing so, differentiate their produce from non-organic produce in the market. Similarly, in California:

“The codification of organic was initiated by private growers. Their interest in creating uniform definitions and standards for organic food was both to protect consumers from false claims and to differentiate the quality of their product in an overt way.” (Guthman,1998:141)

Dabbert et al (2004:18-19) contend that it was only through such a market segmentation that the organic sector was able to grow so much over the last two decades: *“A necessary prerequisite for this market segmentation was a clearly defined production system guaranteed by control and certification systems”*.

In the UK, the organic standards are not under the control of one particular body. In the case of the Soil Association, which is the largest UK certification body, codified standards provide a working definition of organic that is taken from a number of different sources and which is updated continuously. The Soil Association invites anyone to propose an amendment to its standards, which will be passed on to the standards board or to a standards committee if further work is required, and contends:

“We maintain our own standards as they are the practical expression of our guiding philosophy. We feel this is important: ... for the organic movement to own the standards – they are too precious and too important to be left only in the hands of the authorities.” (2005c:section 1.5)

Organic producers, amongst others, sit on the Soil Association’s specialist standards committees, consider changes to the existing standards and make recommendations to Soil Association members. For example, during the research study, I met a family organic producer who sits on the Horticultural Standards Committee of the Soil Association.

The Soil Association carries out a standard inspection annually at a date agreed with the licensee and, on the day of inspection, completes an inspection form. Subsequently, a compliance form is issued with details of areas where the licensee is not meeting the standards. The licensee then proposes actions to remedy the areas concerned. During the inspection, the licensee's records are checked on the premises alongside sales and purchase invoices and delivery notes. The inspector compares inputs with outputs. For example, the licensee has to keep records of daily feed rations and these are checked against feed purchase details. Extra inspections are carried out for several reasons, including moving to new premises and a third party making a complaint.

In some ways, the Soil Association annual inspection is similar to the Periodic Inspection Visit (PIV) carried out by LAUTRO on their life assurance selling members and investigated by Grey (1992). In the case of both LAUTRO and the Soil Association, inspections are disciplinary practices that aim to encourage their members or licensees to self-regulate and to inform them of their wrong-doings, for correction purposes, rather than to hand out punishment or withdraw a licence in the first instance. Using a combination of surveillance and normalising judgement, LAUTRO and Soil Association inspectors assess the practices of the licensee. Soil Association inspectors point out rule breaches and ask for remedial action to be taken:

The farmers out there know far more about what they are doing than I will ever know. Or any of our inspectors will ever know. It's their farm. Each farm is individual ... We actually have the right to terminate somebody with three months notice if we feel that they're not the kind of licensee that we like to have. Now that happens very very seldom I might say. I can think of once, maybe twice, in the last six years when that's happened. So, generally speaking, we try and work with people to make sure



that we can bring them up to a standard. If we terminate them, they want to be organic, they could just as easily go to another certification body.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly to LAUTRO, Soil Association inspectors do not grade their members, although any sanctions imposed are graded as one of: minor non-compliance, major non-compliance, critical non-compliance, and manifest infringement.

Self-regulating as an organic farmer implies something more than being governed by rules and implies a commitment to farming in the organic way rather than as a means to economic survival, although this may not be true for all organic producers. The next section explores organic farming in terms of Foucault's code-oriented and ethics-oriented moralities.

### **Organic Farming: a Code-Oriented or Ethos-Oriented Morality?**

To recap on Chapter 3, Foucault distinguishes between a code-oriented morality that involves self-regulation to rules and an ethics-oriented morality that embodies setting your own rules of conduct. However, it seems that Foucault did not intend to place a binary division between these two modes of self-regulation. The difference is rather more subtle: in an ethics-oriented morality, one is more concerned with the relationship one has with oneself than with exact observance of a code. Foucault makes it clear that responding to rules can involve forming oneself as an ethical subject, for one still makes choices between the different possible ways to act. The difference between self-examination and confession seems to equate to Foucault's distinction between an ethics-oriented morality and a code-oriented morality. Confession, whether carried out inside a church or a work organisation, is self-regulation through a response to the rules of that institution: one is asked to "play the game" by confessing one's sins at Church or announcing one's merits and

debits at the annual work appraisal. Self-examination, on the other hand, is linked to the attainment of virtue and becoming a better person and is hence correlated in this thesis with Foucault's ethics-oriented morality, or ethics of the self, the care of the self.

Clearly, all produce sold commercially must be farmed following the standards of a certifying body, equating to Foucault's code-oriented morality. But is a code-oriented morality sufficient? Do organic food producers also subject themselves to organic farming practices through an ethics of the self that drives them beyond the dictates of the standards? A representative from Northumbria Organic Producers contends that many of the conventional producers, who were attracted purely by organic conversion payments and did not take organic principles seriously, have now reverted and that it is the committed organic farmers who continue to farm organically (Short, 2005). Lobley et al (2005:101) found that organic farmers were more likely to state their commitment to organic farming as a set of principles if they engaged in direct sales, with 46 per cent reporting that they would not farm in any other way but organically.

In 1984, Lawrence Woodward, director of the Elm Farm Research Centre, wrote *"the single most difficult obstacle a farmer wishing to convert to an organic system must overcome is to change his own thinking and approach to farming"* (9). Converting a farm from non-organic to organic, non-organic's "other", involves a change of mindset, demonstrated by the following quotations from *Farmers Weekly*:

"More often than not the first hurdle appears not to be converting the farm but converting the thinking and problem-solving approaches used by the farmer. Stephen Briggs, of Abacus Organic Associates, says that organic farmers do not

have the luxury of the quick fixes so important in conventional systems – for example they can't simply spray the weeds off with a herbicide." (Monroe, 2003a)

" ... "The biggest challenge in going organic is to alter your mindset so that you are thinking like an organic farmer rather than a conventional producer. You are changing from one system to another – there's no two ways about it ... Conversion is rightly named. Both farm and mind go into a period of change." (quote from Jeremy Burdett, currently converting a mixed farm comprising 146ha owner-occupied and 182ha rented) ..." (Horne, 2006)

An organic producer I interviewed explains the difference between farming organically and non-organically:

And there's very few crops that you can't knock the weeds out of conventionally. But organically, you can't. And you can't give them a fertiliser to give them a boost. You know, I've got some lettuce that are struggling down there and they have to struggle. So unless you've got the right mindset and you know that's going to happen. You've got to say to yourself, that's part of the expense of the job and there wasn't a lot I could do about it. But you do have to have that enthusiasm. There's a lot of conventional people come in and had a go and gone out again because they haven't got the enthusiasm, they're just doing it for monetary gain ... The big agrobusinesses will because they're different because the people aren't doing it themselves. If there's a patch of carrots to be weeded, they don't go and get on their hands and knees and do the soul-destroying jobs. They pay a Polish person to do it ... But the ordinary farmer, the hands-on farmer, I really think that they've got to be an enthusiast to make it happen. <sup>10</sup>

This organic producer is suggesting that you do need to subscribe personally to an organic ethos and that simply following rules on how to farm organically will not keep you going when times are hard. In contrast, *Farmers Weekly* featured a



farmer converting 240ha to organic who stated *"the driver has been economic"* (Gairdner, 2006). Evidently, the economic gains envisaged included being in a position to respond to an increased demand for organic grain, avoiding the rising cost of fertiliser, diesel and agrochemical inputs, requiring less storage due to lower yields, and improving public relations: *"Farming this close to London will become more difficult. People don't want to see sprayers running up and down the field"* (Gairdner, 2006).

Some claim that organic food production has become similar to conventional mainstream farming in switching from an organic social movement to a highly regulated and institutionalised industry with the smaller pioneering organic farmers being marginalised and squeezed out. This is known as the conventionalisation argument (see for example Guthman, 1998; Kaltoft, 2001). The result is bifurcation, whereby one stream comprises larger industrialised growers distributing to supermarkets and the other consists of purist growers supplying locally through alternative distribution channels such as box schemes (Wycherley, 2002; Guthman, 2002; Morgan and Murdoch, 2000; Murdoch and Miele, 1999).

Gomez Tovar et al (2005) found two modes of certified-organic agriculture co-existing in Mexico that originated from two phases. Initially, a "first wave" of certified organic agriculture was introduced in southern Mexico by activists from consumer countries, who worked with indigenous people to satisfy a demand for fair-trade, organic coffee. The plots were small and the peasants used a low-input, process-oriented, labour-intensive mode of farming. As these people were using organic production methods already, certification was implemented quite easily. From 2000 onwards, a second wave of certified-organic agriculture was implemented in north Mexico that was *"dominated by US distributor investment in contract production by agribusiness interests and large farmers"* (466). This second

wave of certified-organic agriculture was a high-input, capital-intensive mode of farming. Through the credit and capital incentives offered to them, this second group of Mexican farmers was able to meet consumer demand for year-round produce and, simultaneously, reduce labour costs. Gomez Tovar et al go on to report on the organic practices engaged in by the agribusiness organisations in North Mexico:

"Large producers rely on conventional mechanical technologies, but combine them with organic production techniques, such as shade screening for pest control, automatic nutrient monitoring, use of plastic barriers, and active biological research to increase yield and reduce costs. Following the input-model, large producers replace agrochemicals with organic inputs, such as compost, green manure, liquid compost preparations, composite nutritional powders, biological control (fungus, bacterias and natural predator species), commercial organic inputs made of natural plant ingredients (garlic, neem, ruda, epazote, marigold, oregano, etc.), and mineral additives (calcium, sulver, copper sulfate), hedgerows, and traps (pheromone and plastic). The bulk of seed is imported. This group also tends to operate both conventional and organic farms, in separate areas." (2005:468)

In contrast, the indigenous smallholders in South Mexico were found to use non-mechanised methods of production, including crop rotation, composting, plant-based pest control, and intercropping. Whilst agribusiness tended to use low-paid agricultural labour, smallholders used family labour. The larger producers also had their own technical assistants dedicated to dealing with the certification agencies and inspectors.

In Britain, Frost and Wachter (2003) note a reduction in radicalism and ethical commitment in the organic movement since the recent expansion of the market. Clunies-Ross (1990) identifies a debate over pragmatics versus purity running

throughout the lineage of the organic movement, with a new generation of organic producers during the 1970s and 1980s emphasising the pragmatic approach. In New Zealand, Coombes and Campbell (1998:139) also identify a shift in the perceived meaning of “organics” following the conversion of a substantial number of growers from conventional agricultural backgrounds, in that a notion of allowable inputs became more important than a philosophical commitment.

The Director of the Soil Association, Patrick Holden, recognises that when a radical movement becomes mainstream, there is an accompanying risk of losing some degree of integrity through a set of opposing influences: *“These influences appear in a variety of guises: the lowest common denominator is invoked at government level: vested interests exert downward price pressure; and ignorance about the underlying radical philosophy takes hold”* (2004).

In the United States, a group of producers who consider themselves to be organic pioneers are addressing this issue by introducing a form of market segmentation within organic itself to differentiate their produce from standard US organic farming practices (Howard & Allen, 2006). The US organic standards prohibit certain inputs but do not allude to other organic movement ideals such as preservation of small farms. To gain acknowledgement that they farm to higher standards, the group of producers studied by Howard & Allen are instigating peer-certified labelling schemes that encompass additional criteria including animal welfare, social justice, and minimal packaging (2006).

Additionally, Dabbert et al (2004) recognise the potential of market segmentation within organic to reward financially those who are the “most organic”:



"Stricter standards can be considered as a means to gather the 'true believers' in the idea of organic farming around the flag of these stricter standards, more closely reflecting the original ideas of organic farming. From a marketing point of view, stricter standards can be seen as the basis for further market segmentation within organic farming in an attempt to receive an additional premium for being the 'most organic' among the organic farmers." (Dabbert et al, 2004:48)

In this extract, another layer of complexity is injected into the issue of whether organic food production engages the organic producer in a code-oriented morality, an ethics-oriented morality, or a combination of both. By rewarding the "most organic" farmers with an additional financial premium, it can be conjectured that some organic producers who are more economically driven will decide to farm to the stricter standards in order to gain an additional premium. This is an interesting concept because of the added dimension of the more economically driven producer farmers adopting the practices of the "most organic producers" for instrumental motives without gaining any greater philosophical commitment to organic values.

The hierarchy of organic within the UK certifying bodies referred to earlier provides scope for encompassing different kinds of organic producer. OF&G today advertises itself as "*The practical organisation for organic certification*" (OF&G website) and adheres to the minimum UK standards (Greer, 2002). In contrast, a Soil Association advert from 1990 (Clunies-Ross & Weisselberg, 1990:9) displays "*The Symbol of Organic Quality*" above the logo. Bodies involved heavily in mainstream agriculture, such as DEFRA and NFU, of course have little latitude within which to support the ethos of organic agriculture which confronts some of the main ingredients of mainstream farming.

Some UK organic farms are extremely large. Laverstoke Park Farm comprises 2,500 acres in conversion to biodynamic production; the owner, ex-Formula 1 driver

Jody Scheckter, has a payroll of 60 (Fort, 2007). Being regulated by an organic certification body requires comprehensive record-keeping and paperwork, which is inspected at the annual audit. Large-scale organic farming businesses can afford to have one person dedicated to the paperwork required by DEFRA and the Soil Association. The owner of a small family organic farm explains the difference in economies of scale:

Do people, when they go and pick their organic potatoes up off the shelf, do they really realise that it's grown on an agrobusiness on that type of system and then used an industrial model to get them on the shelf of the supermarket? ... Those big companies – their paperwork will be up to speed because they have a man to look after it, whereas I have to do mine after tea. In actual fact, as far as records and all the rest of it, theirs are going to be absolutely spot on because a man looks after it ... People think of an organic farm as more like we are than like those big people producing vast quantities of produce.

The Soil Association (2000d:section 5.1.4) recommends that a well-designed crop rotation is central to organic production. Further on, the Soil Association (2000d:section 5.1.11) forbids growing potatoes on the same piece of land within three seasons. To get round this, a family organic producer explains how the larger producers “borrow” organically converted land off other farmers for a short period, use it for production, and then hand it back to the farmer to sort out issues like crop rotation and fertilisation:

When I said they go on to a farm and take all their kit, grow it for 12 months, pull it out, what they're doing is actually using that farmer's rotation. It's the farmer that's organic ... You just take that 100 acres and you grow the crop and you pull out again. But that firm, actually, they haven't done anything wrong as such. They've grown it in an organic regime. They've done everything organically with it. But in

actual fact, it's just a pure industrial model that they've dropped into. That business hasn't had to gain any fertility. They just bought it [fertility] off the farmer.

Firms who borrow land in this way use the goodness that has been put in the soil by someone else to grow organic produce on an industrial-scale. Once the produce is harvested, they abandon the land. Hence, they fail to engage in the crop rotation practices that are fundamental to an organic farming philosophy.

One issue that has come up very recently is whether the Soil Association Standards Board should take steps to reduce organic imports. In a recent report, the Soil Association initiated an open debate in response to a contradiction raised by organic consumers, Soil Association members and licensees “*between air freighting organic food and some core elements of the organic principles*” (2007a:2). In section 8 of this report, the Soil Association invites a response to the key issues identified. The issue is complex and raises an ethical dilemma. The Soil Association points out that air freight has, questionably, boosted the growth of the organic market and thereby supported UK producers through ensuring continuity of supply throughout the year. Additionally, organic imports have enabled employment in both production and processing in developing countries that are generating far fewer greenhouse gases than developed countries. In some developing countries, exporting organic food has enabled the growth of a domestic organic market. The Soil Association refers to a report on food miles that points to further associated issues:

“The impact of food transport can be offset to some extent if food imported to an area has been produced more sustainably than the food available locally. For example, a case study showed that it can be more sustainable (at least in energy efficiency terms) to import tomatoes from Spain than to produce them in heated greenhouses in the UK outside the summer months. Another case study showed



that it can be more sustainable to import organic food into the UK than to grow non-organic food in the UK. However, this was only true if the food was imported by sea, or for very short distances by road.” (DEFRA, 2005c:Executive Summary, p. v)

The next section considers how organic producers distribute their produce.

### **Organic Food Distribution: Regulation by the Major Retailers**

The last section showed how organic food producers are regulated by the standards of their certifying body but are also self-regulating. This section considers the regulation and self-regulation of organic food producers in the distribution of their produce to commercial outlets. All organic produce marketed in the UK must display the words “Organic Certification” followed by the EU code for the certifying body that licensed the last operation, for example “Organic Certification UK5” for the Soil Association. The name, initials or logo of the certifier can be used in addition. Appendix 1 provides a list of codes for English certifying bodies.

To what extent does a label capture what is happening at the point of production? To find out, Getz and Shreck (2006) studied an organic cooperative *del Cabo* in Mexico and a group of Fair Trade farmers in the Dominican Republic. *del Cabo*, initiated by two US organic farmers, has operated divisively by excluding some farmers from what was once a close-knit community. The cooperative’s agronomists allowed some farmers to have more land certified than others. Some farmers have no access to the scheme whatsoever. Furthermore, community farmers had previously used bartering and exchange amongst themselves and continued to do so to some extent. Effectively, non-organic produce was traded into the cooperative and sold as organic.

The Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food was set up to advise the government on creating a sustainable and competitive food and farming sector and recommended developing a strategy to address all parts of the organic food chain in England (2002). In response, DEFRA launched an Organic Action Plan (DEFRA, 2002) to develop organic food and farming in England. The Organic Action Plan team<sup>11</sup> made more than 100 recommendations. The main recommendation was to increase the UK-produced share of the organic food market by at least 70%. The Soil Association (2002) reported that, whilst UK organic food sales had reached £920 million, the proportion of imported products still accounted for 65 per cent of sales; supermarkets continued to stock imports despite UK produce being available. A progress report produced by DEFRA (2004) on the Organic Action Plan stated that UK organic produce was on target to reach 70 per cent by 2010. The Soil Association (2004), however, found that imports remained static at 56 per cent during 2003-4.

Some of the issues identified by the UK Organic Action Plan were taken up at the European level through a European Action Plan for Organic Food and Farming, presented by the European Commission to the Agriculture Council in 2004. The European Action Plan identified marketing problems due to variations between the standards applied by producers in the member states and set up an action to *“establish and maintain an Internet database listing the various private and national standards (including international standards and national standards in main export markets) compared to the Community standard”* (Commission of the European Communities, 2004:11). It was also declared that variations should be minimised. Furthermore, regarding EC 2092/91, the Commission stated:

“Although the regulation does formulate the limits of what may and may not be labelled as ‘organic’, the basic principles of organic agriculture itself are not clearly defined” (19).

An evaluation of the European Action Plan runs until December 2008.

The largest outlet for organic food, as for non-organic food, is the multiple retailer or supermarket<sup>12</sup>. During the twentieth century, self-service food shopping was introduced and gained rapid popularity. During the 1920s and 1930s, chain grocery stores proliferated in Chicago, US. Deutsch (2002:157) suggests that customers, and particularly women, were attracted by the concept of self-service as a route to independence: *“Chain stores succeeded not only because of low prices but also because of their ability to defuse the tense and often time-consuming negotiations between grocers and customers”*. Conversions to self-service began in Britain in 1947, and soon became popular with the multiples who realized that operating larger shops was more economical (Seth & Randall, 1999). As food customers shopped increasingly at the supermarkets, the smaller independent shops closed mainly because they could not compete on price. In 1961, there were 116,000 independent grocers in England; by 1997 the number had reduced to 20,900 (ETRA, 2000). The All Party Parliamentary Small Shops Group (2006:6) announced recently that, due to a heavily balanced trading environment, many small shops would cease trading by 2015. The group recommended establishing a retail regulator to oversee a moratorium on any further mergers and takeovers in the retail sector until the regulation of that sector had undergone structural change (72).

Competition between multiple retailers is intense, pressurising them to cut costs and expand for survival. Large-scale sourcing is more economic for supermarkets who therefore tend to operate on a reduced number of suppliers who can deliver



large quantities. When the multiple retailers operate on these economies of scale, the farmers who supply them then have to reduce their customer base and depend increasingly on a few contracts only, or possibly only one. Blythman (2004) reports interviewing a horticultural cooperative that, in 15 years, had its customer base reduced from 45 customers buying vegetables daily to four major multiples. The supermarkets are then in a strong position to keep down prices on supply contracts because of the impact to farmers of having a contract terminated. Vorley identifies the growing gap between production price and retail price as a world-wide one related to agrifood chains in which individuals or organisations downstream of farmers *“are earning greater profits than would be expected from an open, competitive market. This expression of buyer power applies as much to coffee from Peru as to carrots from Lincolnshire”* (2003:20, emphasis in original).

The Competition Commission (2000) published a report on the supply of groceries from multiple stores in the UK, revealing that the main retailers carried out most of the (mal)practices alleged by suppliers, such as requiring suppliers to make payments or concessions to gain access to supermarket shelf space. In 2002, the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) drew up and monitored a Supermarket Code of Practice. A subsequent survey showed that the code was not working very effectively with low respondent levels: more than half of dairy farmers and more than one third of fruit and vegetable growers reported being paid an amount that was the same as or less than the cost of production for their produce (FoE, 2003). Furthermore, farmers verified that all four major retailers were continuing to carry out practices identified by the Competition Commission as practices that the Supermarket Code of Practice should address (FoE, 2003). For example, 17 per cent of farmers had to wait more than 30 days for an invoice to be paid; and 16 per

cent had been required to meet the cost of unsold or wasted products unrelated to a quality problem with the product (FoE, 2003).

Subsequently, OFT carried out a compliance audit on the Supermarket Code of Practice. Fear amongst suppliers of complaining was identified as the principal reason for the code's ineffectiveness, including concerns at being de-listed by the supermarkets or being required to trade with them on worse terms if they made complaints (OFT, 2004). In 2005, OFT alleged that on the whole supermarkets had complied with the Code of Practice (OFT, 2005a), concluding that that there was no need to revoke or change the existing Code of Practice (OFT, 2005b). In 2006, the All Party Parliamentary Small Shops Group (2006:70-1) referred to *"the implementation of a Code of Practice that suppliers feel too intimidated to use because it cannot guarantee anonymity"*. In May 2006, OFT again referred the grocery market to the Competition Commission, this time acknowledging that buyer power probably does prevent, restrict, or distort competition in the market for grocery supply by UK retailers (OFT, 2006:55, section 6.29). The Competition Commission is currently investigating the groceries market. One of the issues to be considered is whether any aspect of the behaviour of grocery retailers towards their suppliers affects competition in any market.

Organic farmers who supply supermarkets are not excluded from the (mal)practices reported by the Competition Commission. Lobley et al (2005) had many cases reported to them of demands placed on organic producers by the multiple retailers. Horticultural organic farmers reported that the supply chain clients to whom they distribute want the economies of scale that they have achieved with non-organic produce, which is a consistent supply of vegetables from fewer suppliers, resulting in supermarkets starting to use the larger farmers who have come into organic farming (Lobley et al, 2005). Similarly, Seyfang (2006) found that the experiences of

many members of the East Anglian organic food producer cooperative Eostre in selling organic produce to supermarket chains were not good:

"The farmers complained of a fall in sales and prices during the 1990s recession, plus continual late payments, insecure sales, high wastage of produce and continual downward pressure on prices which resulted from dependency upon a single buyer. These farmers sought greater control over their businesses by developing direct marketing routes such as box schemes, farm shops, farmers markets, etc, and serving local markets." (392)

An organic producer I interviewed reports:

Supermarkets, no. They want cosmetically beautiful produce. There was a very famous case last year. A woman lost her husband, and one thing and another, and she was organic, she lost her cattle. She was offered a contract for growing potatoes by organic farm crews at Comfreytown for supermarkets. She grew them, sent them all in and only 20 per cent of them were accepted because they were not cosmetically beautiful. The other 80 per cent weren't accepted, by which time they were too far gone to resell. She was only offered 20 per cent of the contract and they took a long time to give her the money and the poor woman was, and still is, suffering.<sup>13</sup>

The Commission for Rural Communities (2005:92) reported recently that supermarket demand for large quantities of consistent and cosmetically perfect produce has resulted in most food being sourced from very large farms, thereby encouraging intensification of agriculture and a greater use of fertilisers, pesticides, herbicides and fungicides. One trend is for American multinationals to buy up British organic brands. Rachel's Organic was created by Rachel Rowlands at her family farm, Brynlllys, the first registered organic dairy farm in Britain. In 2003, Dean



Foods, which operates more than 120 plants in 36 US states, acquired Rachel's Organic through its subsidiary company Horizon (Cookson & Rowell, 2003).

Ethical consumption is on the increase. Correspondingly, food is fast becoming an ethical issue. A third of British shoppers are prepared to spend more on ethical foods including Fairtrade, free range, local and organic produce (Finch, 2006). Moore proclaims: "*After the orgy of consumption, some consumers are trying to construct an ethical life around pleasure*" (2006:425). A report produced by DEFRA asserts that local sourcing of food would present greater market opportunities for smaller producers using less intensive methods:

"Local sourcing of food will improve the market for organic and other forms of sustainable agriculture, through offering more market opportunities for smaller producers, who tend to use less intensive methods. The current system whereby the bulk of food is sourced from very large farms, whether in the UK or overseas, encourages intensification of agriculture. This arises from the demands of supermarkets for large quantities of consistent and cosmetically perfect produce, which can lead to more use of fertilisers, pesticides, herbicides and fungicides." (2005c:92)

Lobley et al (2005) found that cooperatives featured in the supply chain of many organic producers, typically in the horticulture and field-scale vegetable sectors: one retailer talked about providing a market place for small and medium size growers who do not grow enough or do not have sufficient range for a farmers market. Furthermore, Lobley et al found that organic status indicated the quality of the produce and acted as a bridge between producers within informal networks of trust and also between producers and customers. One interviewee stating that customers liked the traceability and another that customers appreciated being able to speak face-to-face to the producer (Lobley et al, 2005).

In the Organic Market Report 2005, the Soil Association (2005a) reported that, in 2004, direct sales of organic products through alternative market outlets such as box schemes, farm shops, and farmers' markets, and so on, increased by 33 per cent in one year. By 2006, direct sales were increasing 53 per cent annually (Soil Association, 2007b). Meanwhile, supermarket sales of organic produce continue to grow but at a much slower rate than in previous years (Soil Association, 2005a).

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has presented a combined genealogy and archaeology of organic food production and its regulation. During the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, organic discourses focused on soil fertility. Artificial fertilisers, but not pesticides, were in use on agricultural land. The 1947 Agriculture Act introduced a period of intensification in which farmers were encouraged to use measures to improve their yields in response to a discourse of maximum production through efficiency. These measures included using pesticides to remove weeds and suppress pests. The discourse of efficiency continues today in mainstream non-organic agriculture and is changing slowly. In 2005, CAP reform began to subsidise farmers for managing the farm environment rather than for producing food.

From the 1960s onwards, there emerged an environmental movement and a counter-culture, alongside a growing awareness of the possible hazards involved in using pesticides. During the 1980s, interest in organic farming surged. Organic producers subjectivised themselves to a new organic discourse that extended the old one by encompassing pesticides, animal welfare and sustainability. Certifying bodies have existed since the 1920s, but it was not until 1993 that it became a legal requirement in the EU to be certified in order to sell organic produce commercially.

Following Foucault, it was claimed that organic producers initiated the regulations for organic certification and continue to take a part in maintaining and updating organic standards. In such a context, those who are regulated are also self-regulating. In accordance with Foucault's notion of discipline, inspections are on the whole corrective rather than punitive. Conflicting evidence was produced on whether or not farming organically required an ethics-oriented morality towards organic. The outcome was that small family farmers would need to have commitment, whereas large agribusiness farmers could get along by following the rules without having the commitment because of the benefits of economies of scale. Regarding distribution of organic produce, it was found that those who supplied supermarkets were liable to be more highly regulated than those who distributed through box schemes, farmers markets, and organic shops.

This chapter has attempted to provide an insight into organic food production and its regulation at the macro level. In the two chapters that now follow, the regulation of organic is investigated at the micro level, as suggested by Foucault.

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<sup>1</sup> CAP reform is much criticised by Gilg (1995) who contends the fundamental incompatibility of CAP's original aims of increasing agricultural productivity, ensuring an adequate standard of living for the agricultural community, stabilising markets, guaranteeing food availability, and assuring reasonable prices for consumers. Furthermore, Gilg (1995) maintains that, due to the target price being set far too high above the intervention price and to an absence of quotas being set on sales, farmers were encouraged to over-produce which was not helped by the lack of competition from cheaper imports. Gilg argues that by 1980 big farmers were gaining over the smaller farmers and there were big differences between countries as beneficiaries (e.g. France) or contributors (e.g. UK).



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<sup>2</sup> A cross-compliance inspection and enforcement system is a requirement of Member States that in England is implemented by the Rural Payments Agency (RPA). According to the DEFRA webpage (<http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/capreform/singlepay/crosscomply/qa-crossinspec.htm>, accessed 24/01/2006) the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) is coordinating a number of specialist enforcement bodies, including the Environment Agency, to carry out inspections on a small percentage of holdings. Inspections are likely to be unannounced and a breach will incur a proportionate payment reduction (RPA, 2006:51). For further details, refer to Appendix 3 of the *Cross Compliance Handbook for England* (RPA, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Perversely, pollutants such as DDT and dioxin belong to a group commonly referred to by campaigning groups as Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs). When referring to chemicals, as opposed to food production, organic indicates chemicals based on carbon atoms (see the WWF website: <http://www.wwf.org.uk/chemicals/glossary.asp#o>, accessed 17/02/2006).

<sup>4</sup> Haughley Research farm did not manage to produce scientific proof regarding the benefits of organic farming. Subsequently, the Soil Association switched its organic discourse from a focus on the presence of nutritional qualities to concentrating on the absence of harmful chemicals (Reed, 2003:244).

<sup>5</sup> Oswald Mosley helped to found the British Union of Fascists (BUF) in 1932. To this day, the British National Party (BNP) cites Eve Balfour as having inspired their ideology (BNP, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> In England, financial support for organic conversion began in 1995 through an Organic Aid Scheme (OAS). From 1999 to 2005, support was provided through an Organic Farming Scheme (OFS). Since 2005 CAP reform, OELS provides the organic subsidy.

<sup>7</sup> ACOS's 16 members, who are empowered to advise the government on the minimum legal organic standard, include the Chief Executive of Organic Farmers & Growers Ltd, the Director of Research and Development at HDRA, the Head of Advisory Services at Elm

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Farm Organic Research Centre, the Food and Farming policy officer at Sustain, and Soil Association licensees (DEFRA, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> According to Farmers Weekly, the UK is almost unique in Europe for allowing a phased conversion “*whereby farmers convert parcels of land and carry on farming conventionally in other areas*” (Monroe, 2003b). Farmers are allowed to convert part of their land only and, in a sense, become hybrid farmers for they are neither totally organic or non-organic. The Soil Association does recommend, though, that the whole farm is converted eventually (2000d: section 4.1).

<sup>9</sup> Extracted from an interview with an Inspection Manager from the Soil Association dated 07/10/2005.

<sup>10</sup> Extracted from an interview with a commercial organic producer dated 27/06/2005.

<sup>11</sup> Ben Bradshaw (Organic Farming Minister) chaired. Action Plan team members included representatives of two organic certifying bodies (Peter Melchett, Soil Association Policy Director and Julian Wade, OFF Executive Secretary), Lawrence Woodward (Director, Elm Farm Research Centre), Dominic Dyer (Regional Development Manager, Food and Drink Federation), Catherine Fookes (Consultant, representing Sustain), Oliver Dowding (Chairman of NFU Organics Committee), Tim Lang (Centre for Food Policy), Nic Lampkin (Director, Organic Centre, Wales), Jo Key (No.10 Policy Unit), and a representative each from RSPB, NFU, CLA, IGD (a research unit for the Food and Grocery sector), together with two representatives from UKROFS and five representatives from DEFRA.

<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, many farmers shop at supermarkets. A Farmers Weekly poll on Where do you do your food shopping? produced a response as follows: Local family owned shops (18%); Produce it myself (7%); Supermarket (75%) (Farmers Weekly, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Extracted from an interview with a commercial organic producer dated 29/07/2002.

## 6 Ethnography I: Constructing Organic

“There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it ... There can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy.” (Foucault, [1976]/1988:101, emphasis is mine)

### Introduction

One of the main themes of this research thesis is an attempt to break down the division that has been commonly adopted between the social and the individual, particularly in terms of regulation. The previous chapter looked at regulation through organic standards, where Foucault (1984a) provides us with an insight into how regulation through rules, which equates to a code-oriented morality, also entails self-regulation through an ethics of the self, which is an ethics-oriented morality. Hence, the organic certification bodies provide rules to follow and inspect annually to try and make sure that those rules are being fulfilled. Clearly, though, one would expect organic producers to have their own ideas at the individual level, not only about how to respond to these rules, but also through their individualistic ideas of what farming organically entails.

Accordingly, whereas the previous chapter looked at the macro world of organic by examining the history of organic and attempts to regulate organic, this chapter and the chapter that follows shift to explore organic at the micro level. To reiterate from Chapter 4, Foucault’s rule of immanence advocates studying local centres of power-knowledge (Foucault, [1976]/1988:98). Foucault’s rule of the tactical polyvalence of discourses states that one should not expect to find “*a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between*



*the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies*" (Foucault, 1976 [1988]:100).

Accordingly, the things that are said and done in the name of organic are expected to be heterogeneous and lack cohesion, even within one micro site and perhaps within one individual. Whilst acknowledging that both producers and consumers are producers of organic "truth", it was decided to study organic producers since they control how organic food is produced through the farming practices they adopt.

Hence, to investigate the application to organic of Foucault's "multiplicity of discursive elements" at a micro centre of power-knowledge, the research now focuses on a group of food producers in a non-commercial organic farming community. This group of producers farming collectively comprises individuals who have joined the community at different times and from different walks of life. Community members live together and work the farm together. The aim was to inject more depth into the question of how is organic regulated by raising further questions such as: If the sign "organic" signifies heterogeneous signifieds, how does a group of organic producers agree on how to farm collectively without the governance of a certifying body? How do community members organise themselves into achieving a common way to do things? How do they reach agreement and resolve conflicts? As well as organic farming practices such as weeding rather than spraying, what other kinds of practices of self-regulation might these producers engage in to farm organically without rules imposed from outside? How do new community members integrate their organic thoughts and practices with the rest of the community?

To this end, this chapter looks at the various truth games produced about organic by visiting a localised site, Greenfields, which is an organic farming community.

## **Greenfields: Introduction to a Rural Community**

Greenfields is a rural community located in Meadowshire that comprises housing accommodation in self-contained units of varying sizes, together with communal areas and adjoining farmland. Communal areas include rooms for holding social functions and meetings, a kitchen, a shop, and a large room, the Buttery, for storing and processing milk and meat and for sharing information. Outside, the non-farming areas include car parks and recreation areas. The community comprises singles, couples, and families. Individuals have joined and left the community at various times since its inception and the period of research activity included one founder and several newcomers. Each housing unit has cooking facilities and community members can choose to join in weekly and occasional communal meals to which every unit attending takes a dish of food. Communal tasks include working the farm, maintaining buildings and equipment, and administrative tasks. Weekly meetings are held to facilitate decision-making. Most adult residents take extra responsibility through the role of Coordinator for a particular farming operation such as fields, sheep and so on.

In the next two sections, I explore the subjectivities of community members towards farming and, particularly, organic farming.

## **Farming as a Focus of Community Life**

The general feeling at Greenfields is that farming is a focus for community life<sup>1</sup>. One Greenfields resident said: *“But that would be crazy if somebody came here with no interest in farming, to my mind. I mean, if somebody just wanted a community, then there’s a lot of other communities without the farming element”*.

Finding out how community members heard about the community provided an indicator of how interested individuals were in farming and in organic farming prior to joining. On the whole, community members had heard about Greenfields from advertisements in a variety of magazines, some of which were geared towards farming or gardening organically. Two couples had seen the advert in *Organic Way*, which is the quarterly membership magazine of HDRA (Henry Doubleday Research Association), a national charity for organic growing. Another member saw an advert in *Country Smallholding*, which describes itself as “the UK’s practical magazine for smallholders” and “a well-established smallholding and organic magazine” on its website but with no main focus on organic. This obscuring of the boundary between self-sufficiency and organic is one that will be developed later in this chapter. One person had seen the community advertised in a WWOOF newsletter and one couple had stayed initially on the farm as long-term WWOOFers. Two people found Greenfields in a book of organic places to stay and were drawn in particular to “smallholdings and farming-type places”. Two couples had seen Greenfields advertised in *Diggers and Dreamers* (Bunker et al, 1999), which is a paperback directory of communities in Great Britain, although not specifically organic or farming. One person had seen the community advertised in *Sanity*, which used to be the monthly magazine for CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament).

Where the advertisement is placed is bound to instigate some form of initial impression management, although not all of the adverts are sourced in specifically organic or even farming journals. Two newcomers, seeing the advert in *Organic Way*, had assumed “because the advert to come and live here was in *The Organic Way* ... I think most people are fairly interested in organic”. However, the range of advertising sources suggests that people are not always drawn to living at Greenfields for the organic farming. Evidently, some people might be attracted by



organic farming and an organic lifestyle, some by the farming which happens to be organic, and others more because they want to live in a community. As it turned out, only a small handful of people had experience of farming for their livelihood. One couple referred to already had worked on organic farms as WWOOFers and another couple had farmed an organic Soil Association-certified smallholding for sustainability rather than for profit. One individual had worked on farms for a short time only upon leaving school before moving on to work that was better paid. One family had looked after a relative's smallholding occasionally and another family had enjoyed the experience of helping out on farm holidays. Many community members had grown vegetables previously either in the gardens attached to their previous homes or in allotments, with self-sufficiency as a particular motive: *"And always been interested in growing my own food, having been brought up in a family where we had a vegetable plot and had lots of fresh vegetables ... But yes, my basic motivation is growing food and doing it with other people"*.

The process of becoming accepted as a new member at the community is a lengthy one. As a founder who still lives at the community said: *"I think the most important characteristics of people applying to join us is that they know what it is they're applying to join ... as far as possible to try and find out what it's like to live here"*. To gain familiarity with life at the community, prospective community members attend visitor weekends. During these visits, prospective members sleep and socialise at the community and help out on the farm. A minimum of three visits is required before potential members can apply to join, pending a suitable housing unit becoming available. Everyone at Greenfields is asked if they are OK about the person or persons joining.

During the initiation process, it should surely become clear that the farm provides the focus for the community. Two ring-binders on the library shelves titled 'Welcome

to Greenfields: A Guide' and 'Membership Papers: Greenfields Community FAQs' guide visitors who are contemplating joining the community. One FAQ relates to commitment in terms of time:

How much time will I need to commit to the community?

We used to say that 16 hours per adult per week was required. However, we now feel that this is over simplistic since it is recognised that work and family commitments vary. Also, living at Greenfields is a lifestyle change with, as on any farm, a seven day a week impact.

With this yardstick of 16 hours per week in mind, it does seem that newcomers arriving at the community must have a reasonably strong desire to farm, although that desire may have been acquired only very recently during reconnaissance visits. One resident remarked: *"Well, when I came to visit I absolutely loved milking the cows and sitting there in winter in a cold barn feeling the warmth coming off the warm animals"*. Most adults of working age have full- or part-time jobs and some are located in other parts of the country which entails staying away from the community during the week. Other constraints on time available include having young children to look after. Sixteen hours per week equates to two or three hours of work daily on the farm and other communal tasks, although in reality retired people elect to work much longer hours. Community members have a tendency to say *"Everybody does what they can"*.

One Greenfields resident with no previous desire to farm gained an appreciation for the farming aspect of community life during the initial visits:

I hadn't known that I wanted to farm but when I came here and saw that I could and how appealing it was, it was very important. And I wouldn't have wanted to join anywhere that was just a housing co-op or anywhere that had a strong ideology or

religion. So the farming focus was just the thing for me, really. And good food at the end of it. I think we've all got that in common.

Clearly, the notion of the community not having a religious or political focus was appealing as the following quotes from different residents show:

It was really a wonderful antidote to working life. And also it seemed a really nice way to connect with other people because politics and religion are tricky things.

We wanted something that wasn't based on a spiritual common ground. And the farm seemed a very good focus. So we have our own place but we have this common connection with other people through the farm.

I went through it [*Diggers and Dreamers*]. There's 158 communities. Some of them very religious, some of them religious, some of them religious and political, some of them just political. Some of them, you had to eat every meal together. But here you don't have to.

But I always thought that communities were a bit odd. Semi-religious, New Age.

These four accounts indicate a perception that farming has a low level of complexity, as compared with politics or religion. Now, in this chapter and the next, I shall argue somewhat differently: that it is "contradictory discourses" emanating from different orientations towards this little word "organic" that generates conflict amongst community members in settling upon not only common farming practices, but also practices associated with maintaining communal living areas and individual units. Community members themselves, however, tend to attribute unsettling encounters with their fellows to personality conflicts instead of to ontological preferences towards organic.



For community members with a long-standing interest in farming, community living provides access to a substantial plot of land that they do not have the financial resources to purchase on their own<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, joining the community enabled one person at least to fulfil a lifelong dream of owning a farm: *"I wanted to be a farmer when I was 11 ... It's part of my life-plan .... But the cost of land in this country was going beyond me"*. Similarly, with another resident:

I've always been interested in farming and growing things. And it was always at the back of my mind that perhaps one day I would have a smallholding. And then it got impossible financially in the fact that there's a limit to what you can do on your own. And I started thinking about, you know, maybe getting together with a few friends and doing something. And then I'd come across adverts occasionally at the back of these magazines ... And then I thought "Well, next time I see one of those adverts, I'll ring up and see." And it happened to be here.

For those who knew already that they wanted to farm, access to farmland was only one of the primary reasons given for moving to the community. Farming can be a lonely occupation and the move to Greenfields guarantees the company of others whilst farming. One woman recalled how her husband found farming without company a rather lonely experience:

The smallholding was only seven acres so it didn't make any money. And it was starting to drain on our income. And Martin did it mainly. Because we have the children, it was Martin's responsibility. And he felt a bit lonely really because he was doing it on his own and he wanted to do a similar lifestyle but with others. So we thought this was a good way of doing that really.

Farming, and organic farming in particular, is hard work: *"It's hard work on your own. Of course you can do it on your own but then that's all you can do. It's such*

*hard work*". Hence, several people joined Greenfields as a way of farming in which they could share the workload with others. One resident recalls phoning the community with an initial enquiry:

She said "If you had a farm, you'd have to milk the cow every day. You come here and you don't have to milk the cow if you don't want to. You do just as much or as little as you want." And it just seemed another day in paradise. That's Greenfields ... It's exactly what I want. I milk one day a week. I'm milking tonight actually, because somebody's away. It's just brilliant.

Sixteen hours per week is envisaged as more manageable than having full responsibility for a smallholding:

Whereas on smallholdings, it's your own responsibility. If you're working as well, because smallholdings don't pay, they don't give you a livelihood, then you've got to have some sort of salaried work outside. You're just going to end up being terribly stressed in terms of not having time for either the smallholding, either your work and the children and family responsibilities as well. You know, that's an impossible juggle, I would say. So, this is a wonderful compromise.

One reason for newcomers to farming to join was to learn about farming from others:

We realised it would be rather difficult to make a living off your own. And we didn't know enough. And we thought we'll go to a community, we can learn from the community about farming and build up gradually. And then if we want to get our own place later, then we can, because we'll have the experience.

The visitor weekends, as part of the induction process, seem to be effective in highlighting the status of farming in community life. When people become resident,

how do their organic or not so organic selves fit in with organic-ness at the Greenfields community? The next section examines community members' individual objectivisations of their selves in terms of organic.

### **Objectivising the Organic Self**

In this section, I focus on how individuals objectify themselves in terms of organic through Foucault's subjectivisation-objectivisation processes<sup>3</sup>. What happens, then, when residents at Greenfields subjectivise their selves to this little word organic and, simultaneously, objectivise themselves as organic subjects, both as producers and consumers?

#### **How Organic Subjectivities Begin**

Trajectories towards "organic" in community members' life histories were unique in almost every case. Two responses to the question 'How did you get into organic?' were "*I think by living here*" and "*Moving here, I think*", indicating that one family and one individual at least had become oriented towards organic through moving into Greenfields rather than from following their own inclinations. The founder of the community was introduced to organic by the other co-founders. Someone else moved onto organic growing at another organic community. Two people became organic approximately 10 years ago through working on an organic CSA farm<sup>4</sup> and as a reaction against genetic modification. One person considered her/his self to be organic from teenage years onwards, wrote a dissertation as a student on energy inputs to organic farming, and worked as a WWOOFer for Peter Bunyard, founding science editor of the Ecologist magazine. Someone else had lived in London as an organic consumer, but had not produced organically until moving to Greenfields.



Another individual who had worked overseas on VSO could not pinpoint exactly when s/he became organic:

I can't honestly remember. It was just something. I don't think it was just one moment. It was over a period of time. I think it was when we went to Africa and we were living in a subsistence level community. We saw them growing their own food and they didn't have artificial fertilisers and pesticides. They were just cutting a bit of woodland down and then going in and ploughing it by hand. Digging it by hand and then planting rice and stuff. And it was a very very natural thing to do. And then maybe coming back here to the west and seeing farming and the sprays and all that rubbish. It was that I think that got us into looking at the way we produce food. So probably the seed was sown there.

The remaining interviewees were motivated by self-sufficiency often handed down from parents. One of these followed in the footsteps of a parent who had grown things without sprays:

And we were very hard up and we had a large garden in the country and I grew my own food and realised I was doing exactly as my father had done before me. And it tasted much better than the stuff I'd been buying in Fine Fare which was the local supermarket. And it had flavour. OK, so it wasn't the same perfect shapes. And I thought: "Well, this is fine. I'd much rather grow the stuff and know what's gone into it and eat stuff with a flavour". I didn't look at it as being organic at all. I just grew it in the way I'd been taught by my father how to do it. And it's gone on and on and on. And you learn more and more as you go along about different problems and how to overcome them. But the thought of using chemicals never entered my mind, because I can do it without.

Of the others who remembered their parents growing vegetables during their childhood, all suspected that sprays were used. During some interviews, self-

sufficiency was used synonymously with organic as if the one implied the other. For instance, the following person recalls a lifelong interest in self-sufficiency without mentioning organic specifically:

I always grew up thinking that to have a vegetable garden is a perfectly normal thing to do and in fact is rather a good idea. And I think that, growing up, I wasn't particularly interested at that point. But as I got into my 20s, I always wanted to garden in the various places I lived. And I was quite interested in gardening and enjoyed that. And then as kids started coming along, you think well gardening is a nice thing to do with children. And, of course, children and gardens and growing vegetables somehow go together, as a sort of nurturing activity. And you want them to have vegetables that are fresh and to introduce them to vegetable growing and find out where food comes from. I think that was always part of it. So always I've tried to grow vegetables and it sort of snowballs a bit because it's a pleasant activity and you want to grow more and more and more. And we lived in houses with quite small gardens and so you look outside and the allotment set-up in Shipstown was good. You know that's the way you get more land. And then you find you can grow all the potatoes for the year because you've got enough space and then you can do this and put your fruit up and so and so forth. And you can end up actually growing quite a lot. And that tends to build up gratification and interest in it. So that's the way it happened.

From probing residents into tracing their organic origins, then, I found out that organic had been more significant in the past lives of some residents than in others. One notable finding was that a lot of people talked more about self-sufficiency than about being organic. In the next section, I probe a little further by asking residents what they mean by the word organic through interviews that prompt residents to engage in self-examination.

## Organic as a “Multiplicity of Discursive Elements”

Greenfields advertises itself as located towards “green” and farming organically “as far as possible”. Accordingly, one resident commented that not following specific rules opens up a space for heterogeneity:

I'm quite committed to the organic farming. When we first heard about this place, it is on the website, they kind of say it's an organic farm. And it is in a sense, but it isn't certified. Without standards, without set rules, people's ideas of what organic is are very very different.

In the absence of a code-oriented morality, one engages in an ethics of the self by looking inside for principles on how to self-regulate. The ethical subject decides for her/himself on a certain mode of being to serve as a moral goal: *“And this requires him to act upon himself, to monitor, test, improve and transform himself”* (Foucault, 1984a:28). However, at Greenfields, community members are engaging not only with their own ethical selves but also with the ethical selves of others, making collective self-regulation permanently problematic. As shall be seen in the next chapter, though, this dynamic is often viewed as a positive thing that promotes constant reflection and discussion.

It soon became apparent that the sign “organic” has been, and is constantly being, internalised in varying ways amongst community members. Following Foucault (Florence, 1994), this sign “organic” mobilises an interplay of the modes of subjectivisation and objectivisation that produces various truth games about organic. The mode of subjectivisation is the process by which an individual internalises the sign “organic” and makes her/himself subject to organic. Accordingly, the organic food producer becomes the subject and object of a particular type of knowledge that organic signifies. Concurrently with



subjectivisation, then, the subject through objectivisation becomes an object of knowledge both to her/himself and also to others.

Chapter 3 identified an emerging body of research based on Foucault's concept of objectivisation-subjectivisation interplay (Anderson-Gough, 2005; Beckett & Nayak, 2006; Frandsen & Hoskin, 2006). To recap, Frandsen & Hoskin (2006) analyse the Swedish government's attempts to objectivise the bus driver as a new kind of bus driver who is professional and customer-focused. This new objectivisation is put into interplay with a bus driver's subjectivisations through a series of pedagogic training devices. The goal is for the bus driver to acquire a new professional identity. Furthermore, because there is a specific intention to create a more customer-focused bus driver, the pedagogic devices presented to bus drivers provide explicit messages of what is required in order to acquire a new subjectivisation. In attempting to change the old bus driver into a new one who is more customer-focused, pedagogic devices such as a DVD training film objectivise the subject as this new kind of bus driver and, simultaneously, interplay with the subject's subjectivisation.

The two studies by Beckett & Nayak (2006) and Frandsen & Hoskin (2006) portray attempts to regulate the Tesco Clubcard customer and the Swedish bus driver respectively by presenting them with objectivisations that are created deliberately to manipulate the subjectivisations of targeted others in order to change their behaviour. At Greenfields, though, there are no explicit pedagogic training devices for integrating community members into an appropriate state of organic-ness. And yet all organic subjectivities must have come from a less identifiable somewhere. At Greenfields, too, establishing organic identity is both an individual and a collaborative effort. Collectively, Greenfields uses the Soil Association as a yardstick for assessing the organic-ness of the community, stating that the

community *"farms to Soil Association principles"*, although one resident qualified this statement by adding: *"perhaps in a more pragmatic way than actually what has become very prescriptive rules of the Soil Association"*. Some residents wished to bend the Soil Association rules for the sake of making life easier. One wanted to be organic *"as a general rule, except in emergencies"*. Another said:

So for me organic is living as closely to organic principles and non-chemical principles as possible, but also with a human factor which is to say "What can we manage here?" "Where do we need to intervene?" "Where do we need to make life easier for ourselves?"... Other people would say that it was intelligent to be darker green than I am and to really go the whole hog and not to use any chemicals. But I'm a pragmatist really, well a pragmatist from my point of view, and I would rather compromise 'cos I think human labour and human goodwill are as important as going for a principle.

Through self-examination, this respondent exhibits an ethics of the self that considers the effects of one's actions on other people; goodwill might be compromised through insisting that others put in the time and effort necessary to be 100 per cent organic. In similar fashion, Seneca engaged in the care of the self practice of self-examination to single out those actions in which he had criticised his friends too intensely or argued too much (Foucault, 1984b).

Whilst almost all those interviewed equated organic with not using pesticides, one person acknowledged: *"I've used sprays. Sprays work. As long as you read the packet and don't spray on a day when the wind's on"*. Several people thought of organic as a way of avoiding GM. Whilst one resident had some reservations about organic *"At the moment, for me, organic is just an excuse to put the price up"*, someone else associated organic with better health and greater integrity over food production:

I think there must be a link between the sort of food you eat and your general medical health. Your health is dependent on a delicate balance, isn't it, minerals and all sorts of things. And you're led to believe that organic food, perhaps more than the other food, which is non-organic food, has got a range of trace elements and minerals and so on. So that's where I would think about lots of – I mean I think what used to frighten me are stories about organophosphates which are very pernicious insecticides. DDT, things like that, being found in breast milk. And I've had three children and breast-fed all of them and felt that there is this awful state where you are passing on the chemicals to a baby from a very early age. So that link, yes, it is certainly an important link ... And I think over meat particularly, because we're meat eaters, we're not vegetarian, the way that meat is produced in this country and the meat that we import quite a lot from abroad as well. And from what I can tell, factory-reared meat, you know, seems to be a disgusting product. And you can't sort of guarantee its safety or the level of wholesomeness. And so I'd always go for organic meat.

There seemed to be general agreement amongst meat-eaters and vegetarians alike that one good thing about organic is that the animals are treated humanely:

What do I mean by organic? *[pause]* I think I mean a way of raising the animals that's humane, that gives them food that we have produced for them so we know what goes into their food. I know we buy in peas, but their oats are ours, we mill them. So what I mean by organic is the whole cycle really. Growing the food without chemicals ... and we give them food that we have processed ourselves. Raising them here. Killing them here. Doing all of whatever we do. So I take care of the sheep and the lambs are born here. And I'm here for their slaughter too and I treat their skins. And we do all of that. So in terms of the animals, that's what I mean by organic. A cycle that's complete and that doesn't put them any under stress or they even have to leave the land.



Now whilst those who have never farmed might find it slightly brutal that community members slaughter, and at some point later eat, the animals that are in their care, the meat-eaters at Greenfields believe that it is more humane to eat meat from animals that they can guarantee have been treated well than to eat meat from an unknown source:

We stopped eating meat that wasn't organic before we came into the community because of the way it was treated. We're both great meat-eaters and we think that the animals should be well-treated and ours are extremely well-treated. I suppose a bit like the American Indian. We respect their lives until we eat them.

In an organic system, the animals' muck is valued as fertiliser. Three people referred to crop rotation: *"because of the way we do the rotation in the fields, there's not a big build-up of pests and disease"*. Organic was also referred to as a way of growing things naturally, which is how farming has been done traditionally, associated with *"trying to use different plants to provide basic insecticides"*, and not giving the animals antibiotics *"unless we really have to"*.

Approximately one-third of those interviewed viewed organic as encompassing more than a healthy way to produce food that does not harm animals: *"It doesn't stop at about what we eat"*. Hence sustainability, protecting the environment, and avoiding pollution are part of the organic subjectivity of some residents, setting up expectations of the practices that other people should avoid: *"Because I don't see much point in having a wonderful organic farm that protects the area around you but then is based on destroying the environment somewhere else"*. Clearly, though, not everyone at Greenfields thinks about these wider issues. Whilst working one Sunday morning as part of a work-gang early on in my research, I and two visitors witnessed a pollution incident that surprised me and showed how random acts

carried out spontaneously might upset other ethical selves and produce statements such as *"Certain people keep on doing things, keep on doing things without question because they don't understand or they don't care"*. I quote from my research diary:

The gang's work for that day was to collect all the hedge cuttings from the previous week's hedge-laying and put on the bonfire. The bonfire did not get going. Harry went back to the house and brought back a can of diesel and poured onto bonfire. Lots of black smoke. Then the bonfire returned to its previous state of not doing very well.

At lunch with Rebecca and Lesley, this came up. There were questions asked about how organic is it to throw diesel onto a field on which animals are to be grazed shortly. And the polluting smoke.

(Notes: nobody actually stopped Harry. Is this to do with lack of hierarchy? How are non-organic practices controlled?)

When asked what they meant by organic, there was a tendency for several respondents to start blurring the boundaries between organic and self-sufficiency, and organic and local. In so doing, some of the characteristics of organic such as not using pesticides became lost. I have referred already to how several community members were interested in self-sufficiency prior to moving to Greenfields. One person acknowledged the influence of the self-sufficiency movement and John Seymour's books on self sufficiency: *"I'd have thought probably half the people here are here because of that book ... John Seymour is the kind of father of organic growing!"* Whilst *The Complete Book of Self-Sufficiency* (Seymour, 1976) and other books by Seymour are not explicitly organic by title, in the 1970s self-sufficiency is likely to have been a more fashionable theme than organic. As seen already with the magazine *Country Smallholding*, the boundary between organic and self-sufficiency is often blurred. With self-sufficiency, one is not selling for a profit and

there is no regulatory obligation to obtain certification. It therefore becomes possible for John Seymour's books and the *Country Smallholding* to be maintaining a version of organic that is not necessarily in line with the Soil Association's version of organic<sup>5</sup>. This tradition of self-sufficiency without organic certification seems to be where a substantial number of Greenfields dwellers are coming from and to be a source of truth claims about organic that are at variance with the truth claims produced by those who are more familiar with the code-oriented morality of the Soil Association.

One person at Greenfields addressed the question "What do you mean by organic?" with "*Stuff that I've seen grown, or grown myself*". It did seem that generally people felt that something was more organic if produced by themselves rather than purchased from a supermarket. Since growing one's own enables picking produce as and when needed from the garden, attributes of taste and flavour tended to be attributed to freshness rather than organic-ness. As I did myself when I stayed at Greenfields, it is customary to go out and pick produce just before preparing a meal: "*And that's the advantage. You can just go out to our local food market some people call it, our garden, and just get your shopping*". One newcomer recalled:

I mean somebody was telling me that over the years they've got 20 different types of lettuce. And you know it's just – you eat them at different stages in their life. Because we don't just cut them off, we cut the leaves. So one week, or one day, you might get an old leaf. Next day, you might get a new leaf. So you get a different taste, a different flavour, and that's what to me what organics is – it's taste, it's flavour.

When responding to questions about organic, some residents drifted into talking about local. In one resident's mind, it is more organic to produce non-organically as



long as one distributes produce locally, rather than to send organically-labelled produce by air over thousands of miles: *“Well, if it’s flown 6,000 miles, how can it be organic? Because you’re burning fossil fuels and spraying the world with aeroplane exhaust”*.

Clearly, organic is an ambiguous word with a blurring of boundaries between non-organic, self-sufficiency, and local. The community’s organic-ness comprises a mix of sometimes contradictory discursive elements that stem from a mix of: familiarisation with the code-oriented Soil Association standards; allegiance to a less formalised culture of self-sufficiency that has a more relaxed attitude towards organic; and concerns over the planet as a whole in terms of sustainability and environment. In addition, there is at least one person who does not care too much about organic at all.

As one newcomer observed: *“And different people here seem to think different things are organic”*. In the next section, I ask community members how organic they are compared to the others living at Greenfields.

### **Objectivising the Organic Other**

In the last section, I examined the different representations of organic that are produced as each individual at Greenfields subjectivises her/himself to the word organic and simultaneously objectivises her/himself in terms of organic. In this section, I look at how community members objectivise other community members in terms of organic and situate themselves in a spectrum of collective organic-ness.

By the time I stayed at Greenfields on the WWOOF scheme, I had carried out a few interviews and become aware of the different truth claims about organic that were

operating. However, there is something about living with people in ethnography-style that penetrates further than day visits, observations and interviews. The organic reality of coming to live at Greenfields was something I experienced myself. As someone who eats mostly organic, I assumed that I would be eating organic food during my stay and so I was very surprised on my first night to be given Tesco Best Value Butter to keep in the visitor fridge for breakfast and any meals for which I had to self-cater. As I only buy organic butter, and the farm is situated miles from any shop, I felt slightly uneasy to be eating not just non-organic butter but the very cheap butter with the blue stripes on it. During my stay, I was surprised to find that I might be more organic than some of the residents of this organic farming community and my experiences helped me empathise with what some residents said about non-organic practices. For instance, one community member described how after arriving at the community s/he offered to help another community member plant seeds by hand and was horrified to be offered a handful of what looked like treated seed, which is seed that has been treated with pesticides: *"they were coloured purple or something which usually indicates treated seed"*. Someone else told me they had also discovered *"non-organic seeds"* in use.

One newcomer I talked to was satisfied that the induction programme of pre-visits gave the family a good introduction to living at Greenfields: *"I think we had a good idea of what was entailed ... Yes, I think we were familiar enough with the farming side of the community"*. (Note that farming is used in this quote, but not organic farming.) Other people find that Greenfields is not so organic as they thought it would be from the induction programme:

We were rather surprised at how non-organic it felt to us. And I think that the reason for that is because a lot of people are coming just here for the farm. The organic is not of interest to them. And maybe it's become so over time. But I think to some

people it just doesn't matter. And some people aren't even coming for the farm. So I don't know – if you're not coming for the farm and you're just coming for the community and being in the countryside and a safe place for your children, then I don't know what the organic means to you ... But for us it was extremely important. So when we have noticed things that go against our feelings of what organic is, then we have tried to bring it to people's attention and get people to review it. But we have had some rather nasty shocks!

Through expressing differences and similarities in their organic subjectivities with others living at Greenfields, community members normalise organic according to their own version of organic but also in accordance with a communal organic-ness. In Ancient Greek and Rome and in the Christianity that followed, care of the self involved tracking one's acts, and then one's thoughts or intentions, against a model of absolute virtuous behaviour which was elevated above the world in a pure, perfect and timeless place<sup>6</sup>. In the modern world, the proper way to behave becomes distributed through a population and regulated through the normalisation/surveillance/examination practices that Foucault analyses in *Discipline and Punish*. Being "normal" rather than "good" and "non-deviant" rather than "virtuous" involves tracking one's behaviour against a moving target and so individuals are also measuring themselves against non-absolute yardsticks. Many interviewees acknowledged some sort of hierarchy of organic-ness at the community. Some people have a feeling that they are more organic than most of the others "*And so I would say we must be somewhere near the top*", but nobody seems to feel that they are less organic or the least organic. One person stated: "*I think there are probably four people here who are more organic. And the rest of us fit into a similar category*".



From interviews, it became clear that community members had varied ontologies toward organic. Caring for the organic self was a strict imperative for some Greenfields residents but was something that could be allowed more leeway for others. Clearly, at least one person is abiding by organic farming practices established at Greenfields through an obligation to fit in rather than basing her/his actions according to an ethics-oriented morality:

I am organic in as much as I like to grow things. But I'd still put fertiliser in the soil, I know it's chemical, but it's what the soil needs. You can test the soil for what it needs and get it out of a bag. But is it right or is it wrong? I'm ambivalent. I'm not bothered either way.

How such differing ontologies translate into organic farming practices is an interesting one. I started to ask interviewees "*How organic are you, do you think, compared with other community members?*". This seems to be something that varies over time, according to the current mix of community members. Different people move in and bring new knowledges about organic to update those existing already at the community.

In Chapter 3, Foucault's approach to history was seen to acknowledge a continual interplay between the synchronic present and diachronic past. Detailed analysis of the data revealed that the synchronic and diachronic are always in play for residents as they care for their organic or not-so-organic selves at Greenfields. Each resident negotiates their way in the current organic set-up but also picks up remnants of the community's history which changes as the community regenerates itself through members leaving and newcomers joining. On top of this, the Soil Association rules are a moving target because they get updated periodically and, although the community had been certified by the Soil Association until ten years

previously, residents have not kept up with updates. Since 1995, the Soil Association's organic standards have become progressively more strict and the community has not bought regular updates since curtailing certification membership in 1995:

They're amending them all the time, they're continually changing. And there are things that come in and out of standards. There are certain practices ... It's something like copper sulphate. It's got copper in it so it's a heavy metal, heavy mineral. And it used to be within organic standards to control potato blight. But then they decided it wasn't such a great thing after all because copper is a persistent heavy metal and it doesn't break down and it's not great if you get massive amounts of copper inside you. So it's gone out of the standards since 2000 ... So it changes all the time. I mean, it's to do with science. They're doing a lot of research and work. So when new issues come up, they tend to deal with them by incorporating them into the standards.

Furthermore, as one person pointed out, "*without somebody inspecting what we're doing, maybe we may make some lapses*". Then, newcomers join who have been following the Soil Association standards until very recently and they try to instigate the up-to-date Soil Association rules in the farming community which has been practising without these rules for 10 years. The more longstanding members tend to roll along with the organic-ness established in the past and resist, claiming "*But that's the way we've always done it!*". Hence, this theme of synchronic-diachronic interplay is very clear to see at this particular research site. The result is that farming practices are dynamic and open constantly to discussion at the monthly farm meetings: "*But, you know, within a bigger group like this then more people are going to be aware of different issues. You know, they're going to pick up on different things. In a way, we're kind of pooling knowledge about dangers, problems*". Furthermore, individuals themselves are open to constant change in

their subjectivisations to and objectivisations about the organic food producer. So, for example, one person asserted "*I agree with GM*" as a newcomer but after nine months in a second interview seemed to be expressing doubts "*Do we know it's going to be alright?*". This is a good example of the synchronic-diachronic interplay in which one's present thinking can change over time according to what happens during that time.

Hence, knowledge about organic food production is formed within a particular time-slice at Greenfields and intermingles with the practices for farming organically that have been established in the past. This intermingling between the past and the present is evidenced in the following quote:

And what's happened is that the standards that were acceptable have changed. So for example when I first moved in, people used to use Derris and that used to be allowed by the Soil Association. And nobody knew that it wasn't any more until somebody else moved in and said "This isn't allowed any more and this is poisoning my children and we mustn't use it". And so then we stopped using it.

As one resident at Greenfields said informally, decisions about new community members depend on the current make-up of the community. For example, when a unit becomes available, if the choice of newcomers is between two retired people and a family, then those with families will want to choose the family. As will be seen later in Chapter 7, there is sometimes friction between meat-eaters and vegetarians and it is feasible that meat-eaters might not encourage vegetarians to join the community. An ex-Greenfields resident told me that when s/he lived at Greenfields, opposition to proposals brought in at meetings was rife to the extent that one group formed with the specific aim of blocking a proposal put forward by another group, and without caring about the issue in question. This ex-member said also that if one



unit from a group sold up, then those other people in the same group might also leave. Therefore, much depends upon who is living there at the time, including who is going to be living there in five years' time.

In the next section, I explore the interplay between the code-oriented organic of the Soil Association and a non-codified organic tradition that has been handed down more loosely through the generations.

### **A Meeting Place for Codified and Non-Codified Rules and Values**

Organic food production practices have been formalised via the standards of certifying bodies. But they have also been handed down less formally through the generations in an oral tradition that has strong associations with self-sufficiency, that is producing vegetables in small communities of practice with families, friends, and others. Communities of practice produce and maintain tacit knowledge (see Gherardi et al, 1998; Lindkvist, 2005; Swan et al, 1999, Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2002). Tacit knowledge is shared through "*interaction and informal learning processes such as storytelling, conversation, coaching, and apprenticeship of the kind that communities of practice provide*" (Wenger et al, 2002:9). However, Polanyi (1967) who originated the concept, claims that tacit knowledge cannot be converted into explicit knowledge, which is problematic in terms of identifying organic farming practices. Turning to Foucault:

"It is sometimes the case that these rules and values are plainly set forth in a coherent doctrine and an explicit teaching. But it also happens that they are transmitted in a diffuse manner, so that, far from constituting a systematic ensemble, they form a complex interplay of elements that counterbalance and correct one another, and cancel each other out on certain points, thus providing for compromises or loopholes." (1984a:25, emphases are mine)

Here, Foucault provides a theoretical basis for what appears to be a meeting together at Greenfields between different understandings of organic; firstly, the organic standards laid down by the certifying body, the Soil Association, as a “*coherent doctrine and an explicit teaching*” and, secondly, an organic tradition “*transmitted in a diffuse manner*” from friends, family, self-sufficiency books, and other places. The “*providing for compromises or loopholes*” is seen to equate to the farming organically “*as far as possible*” that a number of Greenfields residents acknowledge. As an instance of a contradiction between codified organic standards and this more diffuse transmission of organic, derris is no longer allowed by the Soil Association, except as a treatment of last resort and then only with the Soil Association's prior permission (Soil Association, 2005c:section 4.11.9) but is openly available from the HDRA's Organic Gardening Catalogue. Foucault goes on to say:

“Given a code of actions, and with regard to a specific type of actions (which can be defined by their degree of conformity with or divergence from the code), there are different ways for the acting individual to operate, not just as an agent, but as an ethical subject of this action.” (Foucault, 1984a:26)

Therefore, one would expect a diversity of organic-ness from understandings of organic transmitted diffusely from one generation to the next. However, Foucault is saying that, additionally, even a code of organic standards provides scope for different ways to conform with or diverge from the code.

Until 1995, Greenfields was a fully certified member of the Soil Association, requiring an annual inspection. Looking back through the minutes of the monthly Farm meeting, I found a reference to the decision that was made to opt out of Soil Association producer membership. Since producer membership was aimed at organisations selling produce, and the community was not selling produce, it was

felt that they could do without spending £100 annually<sup>7</sup> and “*the form filling hassle*”. In any event, “*we have already gleaned much of the useful advice they can give us*”. At a subsequent meeting in 1996 it was suggested that special meetings were held to discuss “*how ‘organic’ we want to be, how much effort we want to put in*”. At a special meeting in March 1997, it was reported “*Despite the short notice of the agenda for the meeting, the number of people attending indicated that there is ~~concern-about~~ [sic] interest in our current practices*”. (In the typed up minutes, “concern about” had been crossed out and “interest in” substituted.) Practices brought up included using wood ash from bonfires on the garden because of toxic residues. Following on, an Organic Audit took place for which each Coordinator drew up a list of how organic current practice was for their area of responsibility in readiness for the next Farm Meeting. Each Coordinator reported back at the next few Farm meetings in 1997, bringing up issues such as worming, vaccinating and providing organic feed for livestock. By 27 November 1997, the Organic Audit seemed to be over.

Self-management, rather than management through rules, is a perpetual theme running through the empirical research carried out at this community and is one that will be explored more deeply in the next chapter. It can be seen also that the existence of a regulating body that will symbolise the community as a Soil Association certified producer is something that never seems to go away fully as a potential source of interest and conflict. The question of “How organic do we want to be?” is deeply embedded in community thinking because of the need to concur on farming practices and engage with the organic subjectivities of other residents.

During the research period, the community considered re-joining the Soil Association as full licensees which would involve an annual inspection and more



intensive record-keeping. The reasons behind this proposal seemed to vary and, from talking with different people, I was unclear as to how the issue had surfaced.

I suggested a visit from the Organic Advisory Service (OAS) which is a free service offered to those considering converting to organic. The results of the four-hour visit and potential areas of non-compliance drawn out from the visit were reported at a meeting I attended in April 2005. The Chair Person went round the room, asking every community member present for a viewpoint on acquiring Soil Association accreditation. Ongoing CAP reform had financial implications because of the new Environmental Stewardship scheme that pays twice the non-organic entry level rate for organic entry level (OELS). Overall, there was some confusion over whether joining the Soil Association was a financial or an ethical issue with one person commenting that the money gained from subsidies seemed to equal approximately the costs involved. Another suggested checking out other certifying bodies that might be less expensive or have different requirements as to being organic. One person conveyed that if the community was not certified, s/he would have some disquiet about advertising the community as organic on their website and in literature. Another suggested advertising the community as “farming along organic principles” rather than go for organic conversion. The biggest concern was losing the autonomy of making their own decisions. Someone contended that the community is its own market and should care about what members eat and the environment they live in, rather than about what other people would be eating if the community sold their produce on to them and, hence, community members should themselves work out and try to address their weak points. The Chair suggested that, as the decision was not clear-cut, people should be allowed to mull over it. My own thoughts from the meeting I recorded as shown below:

I queried this idea of not being able to advertise themselves as organic if not accredited. Can you not still be organic, and not be accredited? What about self-regulation? (Thought afterwards, this is something about Trust.) Is somebody who is accredited more organic than someone who is not accredited? Do the inspections guarantee organic-ness?

Subsequently, a report of a Farm Meeting held during September 2005 stated that a sub group had met and recommended not to go for certification. Instead, the community was to aim to work towards Soil Association standards and to understand the importance of supporting the environmental movement. It was established that not having Soil Association certification would not jeopardise the community's WWOOF membership. In the longer term, the community intended revisiting this question of going for certification.

The issue of whether or not to join the Soil Association remained live throughout the research study, including the period after the decision not to go for certification had been made. In the Buttery, which is the information hub that also serves as an informal focal point for discussion, I was reminded of the care of the self practice of self-examination used by Seneca and described by Foucault (1984b) as follows. During self-examination, the subject's relation to himself is not one of a judicial relationship where the accused faces the judge. It is more like an act of inspection where the inspector evaluates a finished task. In examining his self, Seneca is both the judge and the accused (Foucault, 1988a). Accordingly, in the Buttery, I would run across individuals who would start spontaneously what appeared to be conversations with themselves about why it was not a good idea to be certified at present, although they could have been using me as a listening post. Similarly to Seneca, residents partaking in this form of self-examination seemed to be simply taking stock: *"His errors are of strategy, not of moral character. He wants to make*

*adjustments between what he wanted to do and what he had done and reactivate the rules of conduct, not excavate his guilt” (Foucault, 1988a:34).*

During interviews I asked Greenfields residents “How do you feel about joining the Soil Association again?” Not everyone objectivised the Soil Association in a positive way. One or two respondents had reservations about the Soil Association: one for certifying processed food for, if it did not, then people would associate organic food more with wholefood: *“So on principle I have a few issues with some things that they’ve done, specifically on organic. I don’t really get a good feeling from their organisation and their leadership and such-like that their hearts are quite in the right place; and another for involving large corporates: “Well, I just think certification is a bit of an industry. It involves Tesco’s and so on and I imagine the Soil Association will have to compromise some of its principles when it gets deeply involved in all of that”. This person aligned her/himself more with HDRA for setting “this kind of broad front for organic gardening and the approach to managing allotments and gardens in an organic way and farming as well” without rules to follow whereas, in contrast, the Soil Association “is involved in the certification so it has to, as it were, lay down the law and get involved in saying yes and no and regulating things”. However, someone else thought the Soil Association does not go far enough: “I mean, a certain degree of crop rotation is part of organic standards but if you wanted to be truly holistic you’d have a much longer rotation for instance perhaps”.*

A number of other residents voiced concerns about trying to rectify non-compliances and, in so doing, destroy the way they were used to working. The issue of non-compliance brought out areas of tension between different versions of organic maintained by the Soil Association and generally at the community. One source of tension between the code-oriented morality of the Soil Association and



the ethical selves at the community is the issue of buying in organic feed from outside for organic livestock:

Two years ago we needed to buy some more hay. Amy went to two local farms, one organic, one non-organic ... [and] bought a sample back of the organic hay; our animals wouldn't have eaten it, it was terrible. Appalling. Whereas the hay from the other guy was really nice ... It wasn't organic but it was really nice hay. So, if we'd joined the Soil Association, we wouldn't have been able to make that choice. We'd have had hay that the animals wouldn't have eaten.

It was pointed out during the interview that driving round to obtain organic feed raises issues of pollution and global warming, whereas the community has a symbiotic relationship with the ex-community members living next door who are organic but will not go for certification: *"We cut his hay for him and bale it up and we take some of it and he has some of it"*. One resident suggested that a more proactive way to go about it would be to join the Soil Association and build up a local organic trading network with other producers and suppliers, rather than not proceed forward because of a neighbour. As shall be seen in the next chapter, though, the decision-making apparatus favours the status quo.

Another source of tension is the economic viability of supplementing ewes' milk by feeding organic milk to lambs. The alternatives are feeding non-organic milk, which makes the lamb non-organic, or slaughtering one or more lambs following birth:

Say, for example, one controversial issue is when a ewe has triplets, she only has two udders, what do we do with the third lamb if she can't feed the third lamb? And those of us involved just think "bottle-feed" and we don't actually have organic milk. We can't buy organic milk. So they then have non-organic. First of all, we give them goat's milk which is ours which is organic. But then if we run out of that or we don't

have enough. This year, we've had five sets of triplets so we had potentially five lambs to bottle-feed. And that's a lot of feeding. And some people said "We would rather those lambs were destroyed straight away than bottle-fed non-organic milk".

I asked residents if they knew why the community opted out of the Soil Association some 10 years beforehand. One person recalled:

Because people didn't feel it was worth the expense when we weren't selling anything. It was pure expense. Well, and also we felt that we were striving as far as we could to meet the Soil Association standards at that time and we didn't need to actually formalise it.

There was a feeling amongst some, that you did not have to simply follow the rules to have organic integrity. One of the things that some residents at Greenfields seem to enjoy is a perception that there are no rules. Whilst one resident wanted to join the Soil Association to make everybody keep to certain minimum standards, others were reluctant to through fear of over-policing: *"But I do worry about policing of it. And things like what we throw out. And some people do go to the supermarket a lot. Are we going to drive them away? Are we going to say "Only hard-liners please".* Some people would rather make up their own minds: *"I would want to make my own decisions and not just look at the Soil Association and see what they said" and "We're all adults here. We can make our own decisions on what we think is OK and what isn't".* Several people were averse to the idea of more paperwork: *"You have to record an awful lot more. A lot of stuff has to be written down. And I think you have to draw up all the plans".* Another person said: *"We are here, the majority of us, because we want healthy food. So we are self-regulating ... Because we are concerned about what we consume and about what other people's children consume".* Someone made indirect reference to the stronger pull of an ethics-oriented morality over a code-oriented morality by pointing out that if you are

choosing to do something for yourself, you are less likely to cheat on organic than if you are given a list of prescriptions to follow.

Before moving on to the next chapter, which will explore the issue of self-regulation more thoroughly, I consider organic consumption at Greenfields.

### **The Organic Producer as Consumer**

#### **Food**

This research study began by looking at organic food production, assuming to some extent that organic food producers are also organic food consumers. From the start of the research period, this assumption was disrupted. Prior to a communal evening meal at Greenfields as part of an introductory visit, I was quite surprised to watch as one of the residents poured a bottle of Hellmann's® Mayonnaise over a salad dish before taking the dish down to the communal dining area. This unprecedented finding raised a further question: how do community members' consumption habits impinge upon each other's organic subjectivities? When eating at a communal supper, one has no knowledge of the exact ingredients that have gone into the meals brought down from individual housing units, which may have been sourced using ingredients picked from the farm or may have been purchased at Tesco's. In contrast, if one ate out at an organic café or restaurant, one would expect the ingredients to be organic. Clearly, this might be of concern to those who want to be near 100 per cent organic. This is something that I only really found out through participation at Greenfields as a visitor and WWOOFer and which was confirmed by an interviewee during my stay who said *"Quite a lot of the food is not organic"*.



Evidently, my original idea of researching community members solely as organic producers without considering their consumption practices was flawed. Talking this over with a Greenfields resident, I was told that commercial organic producers are not necessarily organic consumers:

Those people like the smallholders who are certified organic, they you know, they give their animals organic feed. Then they do their shopping at Lidl ... And they just buy rubbish. It staggers me. I just cannot believe that half the food that they buy in isn't organic. And I can't understand it. It baffles me. I don't get it, really.

As it turned out, very few community members consume organic one hundred percent. As one resident asserted *"we have different principles for eating"*. Several people try to live almost totally off the land and limit their outside purchases. The community runs a shop from where purchases such as rice, pasta and chocolate can be made and these tend to be Fair Trade although not necessarily organic. One resident is almost totally self-sufficient: *"I don't do much shopping at all. And when I do, if I need to buy some cheese for example, I almost always buy organic"*. For those shopping for food outside the community, the local market town Hopmarket has a small Tesco's, where I have seen some community members shop but which has very limited organic fresh food, and a market stall run twice weekly by a local organic farmer. But not everyone is a fan of shopping at Tesco: *"I can't believe that in Tesco when you see the organic produce it is so uniform and nicely produced that, somewhere along the way, I think there are a lot of compromises"*. Several people talked about their preferences for buying from farmers markets although, when prompted, admitted not all of the produce is organic, thus again blurring the organic/local boundary. Clearly, not everybody wants to pay for the surplus on organic food bought from outside the farm due to not caring too much about eating organic and/or insufficient funds, for example: *"I*

*would buy everything organic if I could. If I could afford it".* Some people are retired, others work part-time, and nobody exudes affluence. One of the more organic community members commented: *"But when we go the supermarket or whatever to buy extra food, we can afford to buy organic stuff. You know, it's possible that other people don't buy it so much just because it's expensive. You know, they would like to but they don't".*

The practices involved in caring for the self set up the individual to live an ethical life without being told what to do through codification. Through care of the self practices, individuals apply the truth game to themselves. Earlier on, I explained that Foucault (1984b) uses Seneca to illustrate how the Ancient Romans subjected themselves to self-examination. Seneca does not reprimand himself. The purpose of self-examination is not for Seneca to discover his own guilt. Instead, the idea is to conceal nothing from one's self: *"In order to commit to memory, so as to have them present in one's mind, legitimate ends, but also rules of conduct that enable one to achieve these ends through the choice of appropriate means"* (Foucault, 1984b:62). Tesco attempts to regulate consumers' subjectivities through projecting itself into the 'inner circle' of the consumer as a trusted source of information in a world of bewildering choices (Beckett & Nayak, 2006). Greenfields residents, in contrast, are more likely to self-regulate themselves as consumers, engaging in an ethics of the self when struggling with ethical dilemmas over their choices.

Universally, community members prioritised Fair Trade and local over organic. The following resident conducts a form of Seneca's self-examination practice to try and resolve ethical dilemmas over food consumption:

I think there's a dilemma that I would like to buy things that have been fairly produced, fairly traded, I'd like to support that as well. And sometimes it's been a

dilemma for me. Should I buy stuff that's been fairly traded but is non-organic? Should I buy things that are organic but don't necessarily have the Fair Trade label on? And then, to that, add produced in this country as well. And local .... It's not organic, but maybe it's the fairly traded thing that I'm interested in. It depends on the different product that you're buying. But that I'd say you've got three choices. I mean I tend to go for these three things when you're buying stuff. I might say that you can't always be completely consistent over – we all make choices. Balance.

This community member draws attention to the issue that having an organic label doesn't necessarily make a product Fair Trade and local and, in so doing, raises some questions. Which of organic, Fair Trade and local is better? Is buying organic without buying Fair Trade less good than buying Fair Trade that isn't organic? And is buying local better than buying organic? But buying local is not necessarily good, as drawn out by another community member through self-examination:

I would say that Fair Trade is more of an issue for me than organic so I would buy Fair Trade coffee over organic. And if I go to the supermarket, I try to buy Fair Trade. That's where I would be ideological in my choice. And local, yes. I would rather buy local produce. But then you've also got the difficulty – I mean there are some local farms who are being farmed by Eastern European immigrants who get paid a pittance. I've often picked them up and given them lifts because they get bussed down to Hopmarket once a week to shop in Tesco's and all they can afford to buy is the cheapest jam and therefore they're buying sliced bread. They've told me the rates they get paid and it's dreadful. So, if you buy local, then you've got to be careful that you're buying not from fruit farms and other farms where they're employing very cheap labour. So there's another set of politics around that.

So for that community member, buying local might sometimes be very bad because of the risk of exploitation of labour close to home. Another is equally cynical about Fair Trade, although s/he continues to buy Fair Trade as part of caring for the self:



So now I buy Fair Trade because at least a man who is working in a field is getting a fair price - if you believe the propaganda that's put out by the organisation. Well, you know, who do you believe? Who do you believe? At the end of the day, you've just got to be happy with yourself.

In their ethical food consumption dilemmas and in a world where there are no perfect solutions, community residents are self-regulating themselves and making their own decisions in aspiring to be the good self. The organic standards alone do not guarantee Fair Trade and local; neither do they necessarily win the trust of consumers at this community:

And although like everyone else, if I buy something that's organic, it's good to know that it is organic, ultimately I'm not that interested in certifying bodies as such. I would rather have a direct relationship with the producer, so that you know. I would rather get non-organic pork, for example, from a producer who I knew and trusted than buy organic certified pork from Tesco's that had come half-way round the world.

Other consumption practices besides food consumption impinge on fellow residents.

### **Chemical products**

The community is not just a farm but a mix of people who live together in individual housing units and shared communal areas. Different subjectivisations towards, and objectivisations about, organic go beyond food production/consumption to practices such as using chemicals inside and outside buildings away from the farm. Many residents seem frustrated with other residents for being too organic or not organic

enough. Upon joining Greenfields, one resident was surprised to see Roundup®<sup>8</sup> used around the community buildings:

You know, we would never have gone to live in a community that didn't claim to be an organic farm. And when we visited, there was just no way we could have ever found out. You know, we wouldn't see somebody spraying herbicide round the house. So somebody might say it doesn't matter because it's on the farm. To us, it matters everywhere on the land.

As an outsider, I found myself caught within this “multiplicity of discursive elements” that are used to produce truths about organic. One morning, I was tasked to saw down an elder tree that was impeding access to the dustbins. Half-way through, I was confronted by a holiday visitor who, it later transpired, used to live at the community. I quote from my research diary:

A visitor came over to me and let rip. Said that it was very different when she lived here and they used Roundup on those sort of things. I said “That's not very organic!”

She implied that the place had gone to the dogs since she lived here. Said it looked like a New Age Travellers' site. (I quite like it myself – not too much like suburbia.) She said that letting these things grow can cause problems to buildings. And that if you cut them down, you have to keep cutting them down.

Another resident informed me that Roundup® had not been used for a year or two:

I think when Lily used to look after the kitchen yard, she used to spray it with Roundup to kill the weeds. Just in small quantities. Everyone did. But in the last two/three years, that hasn't happened. Because people are prepared to give up something else to hand-weed it. Fine, if they've got the time.

Residents self-regulate the sort of paint they use in their household units, which produces tension between the organic and not-so-organic. One interviewee told me whilst painting her/his unit *"you know, if Jane was here she would probably be complaining about the paint that I'm using"*. There are restrictions on the paint used in communal areas and the same interviewee commented: *"I slightly resent the fact that in the communal areas we have to use this paint which I don't like particularly to use"*.

The use of treated wood is another issue over which people are divided.

We've always used treated timber to repair the farm buildings. Someone felt very very strongly about us not using it and they kept on, and then one or two other people said "alright, we'll agree with them" and at the end of the day I said "Well fine, if you don't want to use treated timber we won't, but don't ask me to build anything. Because I'm not going to waste my time building something that's going to rot." So I went with the decision just to stop time and argument.

Copper, Chromium and Arsenic (CCA) is a carcinogenic that was commonly applied to wood products such as agricultural fencing to protect against attack by insect and fungi. CCA treated wood should not be burned on bonfires. The European Commission (2003) has banned the use of CCA treated wood from residential use but allows it still to be used for agricultural fence posts and structures. In the United States, too, from 31 December 2003, it became illegal to treat wood with CCA for any prohibited residential use, although it was decided that agricultural fence posts could still be treated (US Environmental Protection Agency website). The *Compendium of UK Organic Standards* (DEFRA, 2006b) rules that chemically treated wood should be avoided in mushroom production (34-5) and permits use of sawdust, wood chips, composted bark and wood ash as long as these are from *"wood not chemically treated after felling"* (59), but there is no



reference to agricultural fence-posts. A search on the Soil Association website did not produce any reference to chemically-treated agricultural posts, although the Soil Association did advise against adding “Chemically-treated wood products” to compost (Soil Association, 2006).

To live in a location where treated wood is used and burnt is a concern for one resident:

I worry about some of the things that we use on this farm like treated wood or various things that we do. You know, we use treated bedposts for instance. And then the arsenic and such-like goes into the ground. It can end up on the bonfire if you're not careful ... But even if you just use it on the farm, if it accidentally gets burned in somebody's wood-burning stove. Well, it will give off fumes big-time but also if they use that ash to fertilise the garden or something. There's all sorts of issues that people never really think through.

Indeed, this is not something I had thought through myself before the interview. To show the diversity of attitude towards treating wood, I quote below from two residents who think differently from the community member quoted above:

They reckon using creosote, you can get cancer from using creosote, so they stopped selling creosote. The best wood treatment there's ever been. I've used creosote, other people have used it. I've never used gloves. I know it stung a bit. ... But it hasn't killed me. I'm not dead yet.

There used to be a very big scare about telegraph poles because they were creosoted. Raw creosote, yes, it burns plants, it burns roots, I wouldn't use it near anything I was going to eat. But when it's been in the wood a long long time and if it's used away, I can't see the harm in that personally. If it's not in the vegetable garden and the cows aren't licking it or whatever. So there are issues like that

where you have to use a little bit of common sense. If it was a boundary fence, I would happily use an old telegraph pole, personally. Rather than use a non-treated timber, which would rot in a matter of years. Unless you've got a very wealthy community who can afford to use oak or alternative hardwood, which I don't think we could ... We've had that recently. Some people here have said "We don't want to use any treated wood at all anywhere." So we said "Well, the only other option is replace them every few years, because they rot, or use oak". So we're trying, with some green oak from someone we know. You have to sort of compromise.

Creosote was banned in the UK in 2003.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter shifts the research study from an overview of the macro world of organic to a more penetrating study at a micro site to establish how organic is grounded in people's subjectivities. Through the interplay of subjectivisation and objectivisation practices, individuals produce truth games about organic. These subjectivisation-objectivisation modes interplay to produce simultaneously organic subjects and objectified organic producers/consumers in an organic food-producing community. Accordingly, each organic food producer at this community objectivises both the self and others by normalising the behaviour of her/himself and others in terms of organic-ness.

Early on, it becomes evident that the code-oriented morality of the Soil Association is a constant absent presence that produces various ethics-oriented responses from different ethical selves. During the research period, community members debate whether or not to rejoin the Soil Association as full licensees. They decide not to for now, but the issue remains very much at the fore. The biggest fear seems to be of jeopardising the self-regulation that they enjoy. There are also some issues

about which community members feel they might have to compromise their own ethics in order to follow the rules. Hence, although Foucault says that an ethics-oriented morality is employed in responding to a code-orientated morality like the Soil Association's, clearly an ethics-oriented morality has more autonomy without a code-oriented morality to follow.

Besides subjectivisation towards the formal codified rules and values of the Soil Association, there is strong evidence of subjectivisation by a group of people towards another, less formal, set of rules and values operating about organic and these seem to be grounded in what Foucault (1984a:25) refers to as "*a complex interplay of elements that counterbalance and correct one another, and cancel each other out on certain points*", which are "*transmitted in a diffuse manner*". These less formal rules and values appear to arise from the self-sufficiency movement established during the 1970s, which has been maintained by non-certifying bodies such as the HDRA, handed down diffusely as an oral tradition from one generation to another through family and colleagues, and codified more loosely than the standards of the certifying bodies through self-sufficiency books. Hence, organic becomes even more ambiguous, through blurred boundaries between non-organic, self-sufficiency, and local. Besides these two streams of organic subjectivisation, there was evidence that not everybody had positive subjectivisations towards organic. There was also a contingent who perceived organic to incorporate concerns over the environment at large and the sustainability of the planet, rather than just food production. As one resident summed it up, different people seemed to think that different things are organic.

A further significant finding was the impact of the synchronic-diachronic interplay on which Foucault bases his approach to studying history. How one's organic self fits in with the organic selves of other community members varies according to the



current make-up of community members, which can have a significant impact on organic farming practices. The present, therefore, changes over time as community members move out and new people join. New residents join the community within a particular time-slice and not only engage with remnants of the community past but also bring in their own organic subjectivities. Additionally, the rules of the Soil Association are subject to constant revision and lurk in the background as an absent presence.

Thus, “contradictory discourses” emanating from different orientations towards this little word “organic” are found to generate constant debate and reflection amongst community members in settling upon not only common farming practices, but also on practices associated with eating together and maintaining communal living areas and individual units. Consumption practices are also found to be a source of Seneca-like self-examination through which some community members attempt to resolve ethical dilemmas.

Taking the range of truth games about organic that is produced, the next chapter establishes how this group of organic food producers self-regulate by studying their efforts to formulate and coordinate their various ethical selves in establishing common organic farming practices.

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<sup>1</sup> It was not intended originally that Greenfields should be a farm. According to the resident founder, the co-founders were interested in acquiring an organic smallholding and it was by chance that substantial living quarters with so much farmland became available.

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<sup>2</sup> Between 1993 and 2004, the average price of agricultural land sold in England is estimated to have doubled approximately from £3791/hectare to £7654/hectare (Valuation Office Agency and DEFRA, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> To assess the organic selves of individuals, I asked questions including 'How important was it to you that the community focuses on farming? And, in particular, organic farming?', 'What do you mean by organic?', 'Is organic farming an ethos/philosophy, or is it the way you do things - practices?', and How did you get into "organic"?

<sup>4</sup> Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operates in the United States through non-farming individuals becoming shareholders of a farm, covering costs and receiving in turn a weekly or monthly basket of produce (CSA website).

<sup>5</sup> As Chapter 5 showed, the versions of organic propagated by the different certifying bodies are by no means uniform, with the organic standards of some certifying bodies being far less strict than those of other bodies. For the sake of simplicity, I consider the Soil Association only in this chapter, since it is the most popular certifying body and also the one that the Greenfields residents talk about to the exclusion of any other certifying body.

<sup>6</sup> As history unfolds, caring for the self becomes more complex. Foucault provides us with a "*description of the varying and historically changing ways that human beings have formed themselves, known themselves, and acted upon themselves in our Western, Greco-Roman-derived, past*" (Hoskin, 1990:37). In other words, this is a history of how individuals formed themselves as ethical subjects. In antiquity, one engaged in care of the self through examining one's acts and, later, in Christianity, through examining and deciphering one's current thoughts via confessional practice: "*this continual concern with the present is different from the Senecan memorization of deeds and their correspondence with rules*" (Foucault, 1988a:45). Following Descartes, from the seventeenth century onwards, people were also examining their thoughts in correspondence to reality (Foucault, 1988a:46). When Freud invented psychoanalysis, people started also to engage in confession in a non-

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religious way through therapy via confessing to an Other to discover why they might be acting in a certain way at a level that is below the conscious (see Frandsen & Hoskin, 2006:fn6).

<sup>7</sup> In the case of Greenfields, the Soil Association's initial application fee would be £199+VAT for the first six months, followed by £425+VAT annually for the next two years and thereafter £485+VAT per annum, subject to an annual increase. Soil Association charity membership on its own costs £24/year. For more comprehensive details about the licensing fees charged by the Soil Association and by OF&G, refer to Appendix 2.

<sup>8</sup> Roundup® is a herbicide produced by Monsanto.



## 7 Ethnography II: Self-Regulating Organic

### Introduction

The previous chapter unveiled "*a multiplicity of discursive elements*" (Foucault, 1976 [1988]:100) relating to organic at an organic farming community named Greenfields. Individuals' subjectivisations towards organic, and hence their objectivisations about organic, were found to be shaped by a number of different sources that included rules and values laid down formally by the code-oriented standards of the Soil Association, rules and values disseminated more loosely through an oral tradition and various media and handed down from one generation to the next, and allegiance to a wider social commitment to the environment and the planet's sustainability.

Having established that there is no one internally coherent discourse about organic operating at Greenfields, the thesis turns to look at how community members achieve commonality in organic farming practices and other practices associated with chemical use. How do community members, who are situated within a context in which different truth games about organic are circulating, work together at farming organically without direct rules to follow? Furthermore, how does a subject deal with living and working in an environment that is too organic or not organic enough for her/his level of subjectification to organic? Accordingly, this chapter analyses self-regulation practices at Greenfields at a community level and at an individual level. How does the lack of internal coherence within the organic discourse at this particular localised centre of power-knowledge impinge upon this group of organic food producers in trying to find a common way to farm?

I start by weighing up the significance of ideology and practices to community life before moving on briefly to look at regulation in communities. I proceed to introduce Greenfield's organisational framework. Finally, I use the care of the self practice of *parrhesia* to analyse the self-regulating practices engaged in by individuals to negotiate organic farming practices at Greenfields.

### **Community: Sharing Ideology or Practices?**

Communities have existed across the world for centuries and often have ideological foundations. Thomas More's *Utopia*, first published in 1516, revived the classical use of the term "utopia" that gave rise to the new genre of utopian communities: "*The term is most commonly used to refer to the search for a perfect society, by its very nature unattainable but ever sought*" (Hardy, 2000:17). Other types of community include communes, intentional communities, and cohousing communities. A commune implies some degree of shared ownership. Rigby (1974) identifies six types of commune: self-actualising, activist, practical, therapeutic, religious, and communes that group together for mutual support. Intentional community seems to be a more generic term, covering "*ecovillages, cohousing, residential land trusts, communes, student co-ops, urban housing cooperatives and other projects where people strive together with a common vision*" (Intentional Communities website). During the last 30 years, cohousing communities have developed as non-ideological community designed collaborative housing (UK Co-housing Network website).

Rigby (1974) found that many potential communities fail to get started because individuals find the ideology appealing but drop out when faced with practicalities such as raising capital to buy a property. Even when communities do get established, Rigby observes that people tend to fall out over communal living

practices, including “*different standards of cleanliness, different attitudes towards child-rearing, different conceptions of what constitutes 'laziness', conflicting attitudes towards potential recruits, the use of drugs, and so on*” (1974:19), rather than over ideals and principles.

Do practices contribute more than ideology to sustaining a community? Kanter (1968) groups together organisational practices that strengthen community life under the headings of 1) sacrifice (e.g. celibacy); 2) investment (e.g. financial contributions); 3) renunciation (e.g. uniform-wearing, separating parents and children); 4) communion (relinquishing the separateness between Self and Other through ensuring homogeneity and group participation, via a common religious or ethnic background, regularised group contact including communal dining halls and regular group meetings, and ritual practices such as group singing, and so on); 5) mortification involving “*the submission of private states to social control, the exchanging of a private identity for one provided by the organization*” (510) (through confession, self-criticism, mutual criticism, and so on); and 6) surrender through “*the attaching of a person's decision-making prerogative to a greater power, total involvement with a larger system of authority which gives both meaning and direction to an individual's life ... this can involve, for example, a pervasive philosophy on the one hand and minute regulation of behavior on the other*” (513-4) (e.g. through establishing an authority hierarchy, an irrational basis for decisions, power centralised in a leader who is often a founder, and increasing “*the distance and mystery of the decision-making process for ordinary members*” (514) ). Rigby's account (1974) of the Findhorn Centre of Light during the early 1970s in Scotland presents Findhorn in a similar light, a portrayal that is backed up by the documentary series *The Haven* (Channel 4, 2004)<sup>1</sup>. The emphasis is very much on



subjugating one's own subjectivity within a highly regulated lifestyle (for further accounts, see Sargisson, 2001; Sutcliffe, 2000).

According to Etzioni (1996), "*community requires a commitment to a set of shared values, norms, and meanings, and a shared history and identity – in short, a shared culture*" (5). At Greenfields, the community in the current research study, a shared culture is not so much in evidence. Residents do not subscribe to any particular politics or religion and, as was evident in the previous chapter, they do not share the same understandings about organic. Newcomers were found to be attracted to Greenfields because of a perceived lack of ideological, religious or political focus. Nevertheless, a co-founder identified an ethos of mutual responsibility at Greenfields which s/he put down to the way that work tasks were structured at start-up, although this was not the intention at the time:

I just thought of something else that I think is important stuff. And that is that when we were doing the conversion work, we worked along specialised trade lines. I did the plumbing, together with someone else. We couldn't do the electrical work for insurance reasons. We had to have a qualified electrician, so we couldn't do that. But a lot of specialist carpentry, we also had to get someone in. For the most part, we tended to specialise, so that unlike other places that were trying to set up at the same time, we didn't just sell ourselves a unit and then you were individually responsible for the conversion of that. We instead, I did all of the plumbing ... And I'm sure that was vital in how it worked out afterwards. Because we got used to this idea of us having mutual responsibility ... I mean we didn't realise that at the time. We just did it because it somehow worked out that way. It seemed to make sense. I don't think we even contemplated doing it any other way because what work was to become a unit couldn't be finished at that stage, because we had to put in walls and divide areas up. And there was quite a lot of that. So we couldn't say "I'll just have this area, or that bit" and it's down to us to do the conversion work. But having learnt

what happened at other places ... They were setting up around the same time as us. Maybe a year or so later. But they just sold off spaces and the individuals converted. Now I don't know how they are getting on now, but I thought at the time you know this was the wrong way to do it. I don't think it ever involved a sense of community.

The co-founder provides an example of an ethos of mutual responsibility: when the cows are to be moved from one field to another, the person in charge of the cows asks the other residents to help out: "*We wouldn't question whether s/he was right to ask us for help*". This is something I observed during my stay: a large group of residents gathered together to help bring indoors a sheep that had been hopping agitatedly round the field, isolate her from the other sheep, and return the other sheep back to the field. From that point, it was up to the Sheep Group to establish whether or not it was a case of Fly Strike (it was not) and identify appropriate treatment or bring in a vet.

In following Foucault, this thesis attempts to unlock communities from ideology to focus instead on practices. Accordingly, in this chapter, I argue that it is shared practices rather than sharing of values, norms, meanings, identity or, in short, an ideology, that enables Greenfields to maintain a collective identity of a successful and well-organised community. First, though, I review regulation and self-regulation in other communities.

### **Community: Regulation through Hierarchy and Alternatives**

"I can well imagine societies in which the control of the conduct of others is so well regulated in advance that, in a sense, the game is already over. On the other hand, in a society like our own, games can be very numerous ... However, the freer

people are with respect to each other, the more they want to control each other's conduct." (Foucault, 2000b:300)

Here, Foucault is indicating that the absence of regulation in a social group, whilst appearing to provide freedom, will still result in group members wanting to exert control over each other. This might equate to the tyranny of structurelessness in which an organisation that lacks structure will result inevitably in rule by a hegemony (Freeman, 1970). Barratt says it is more a case of encouraging greater openness within existing power relation configurations, thus allowing games of power to be played with the minimum of domination, than of doing away with power relations (2003a:1079). Etzioni (1996) draws attention to a fundamental contradiction between society's need for order and the individual's pursuit of autonomy and contends that, to avoid the two extremes of anarchy and excessive centralised political and social control, communities must endeavour constantly to keep a good balance between maintaining order and allowing autonomy: "*It [the community] must respond like a person riding a bicycle; it must continually correct tendencies to lean too far in one direction or the other, as it moves forward over a changing terrain*" (9).

Regulation has long been a component of communal living. With the disintegration of the East Roman Empire, Brown (1971) charts how communities of small farmers in fifth and sixth century Syria used their local Holy Man as a mediator to settle disputes<sup>2</sup>. The Holy Man was trusted as an outsider who lived a hermit existence on a mountain top overlooking farmers at work and villages (Brown, 1971). At this time, the concept of communal holy living was beginning to circulate. St Basil had introduced the concept of community to monastic life in the late fourth century (Gasquet, 1909). Brown (1971:98) notes that monastic communities grew up rapidly around the local Holy Men in Syria and Palestine in the fifth and sixth centuries. St



Benedict codified the monastic system by producing a code of laws as a substitute for the personal will of a Superior, so that by the end of the eighth century the Rule of St Benedict had superseded all other rulebooks (Gasquet, 1909).

Irish monasteries were each organised as a hierarchy in which coordination was “*achieved through high levels of formalisation, highly centralised and autocratic direct supervision ... intense socialisation and social control*” (McGrath, 1999:135).

The monasteries had extensive rule books that detailed “*their internal division of labour, desirable behaviour and punishments*”, requiring total obedience within the dominant control model, which was kinship (McGrath, 1999:136).

Summerhill School, a progressive coeducational school founded in 1921 by AS Neill, provides an example of a community where self-regulation is positively promoted. Neill (1937) talks about self-government at Summerhill as follows. There is a class timetable for the staff but, for children, all lessons are optional. Many offences such as riding someone else’s bicycle without permission are subject to an automatic fine rule. Fines include half a pocket-money or missing a trip to the cinema. At a weekly meeting, cases of charges of offences not satisfied by the automatic fine rule are read out and proposals for creating or changing school laws are made. Decisions are made through voting and everyone’s vote has equal value, including teachers and children of all ages. Everyone has equal rights: “*No one is allowed to walk on my grand piano, and I am not allowed to borrow a boy’s cycle without his permission*” (13-14). At the beginning of each term, bedtime rules are made by vote and elections take place for committees and officers. Self-regulation through self-government is viewed as character-building and as a more positive form of governance than regulation imposed on pupils through rules and hierarchy:

“Now Summerhill is a classless society. The wealth and position of your father does not count. What counts is your personality. And what counts for most is your sociability, your being a good member of the community. Our good manners spring forth from our self-government, for in self-government you are constantly being compelled to see the other person’s point of view.” (86) <sup>3</sup>

Summerhill is a school where children experience freedom to be what they like as long as that does not entail interfering with the freedom of others (Neill, 1937:39). At the same time, there is structure. There is a timetable for lessons and there are many laws, or rules. Currently, school meetings are held Monday, Wednesday and Fridays from 1:45 until about 2:30 and a new chair is elected every week; just before each meeting, issues are presented to the secretary who creates the agenda and records the meeting (Summerhill website).

### **Greenfields: an Organisational Framework**

Summerhill shows that putting in place an organisational infrastructure need not necessarily compromise freedom and that practices can be used to facilitate the implementation of a particular philosophy such as progressive education. Indeed, it might be argued that structure, or a certain kind of structure, enables freedom.

Greenfields provides an organisational model of a cooperative community organising itself within a context of equality:

No-one’s the big boss here. No-one’s in charge. We have coordinators for different jobs but, even so, within any job there is a latitude and space to discuss the best way to do it. And that’s fine.

To facilitate coordination and decision-making, Greenfields has in place a sharply defined organisational framework for collective self-management. Quite unexpectedly, the organising practices through which organic farming practices are decided were found to equate to Burns & Stalker's organic system (1961). In contrast to a mechanistic system characterised by a "*hierarchic structure of control, authority and communication*" (120), organic systems are stratified and "*positions are differentiated according to seniority – i.e., greater expertise*" (122). Authority is assigned to those who show themselves to be most informed and most capable and "*the location of authority is settled by consensus*" (122).

The organisational framework is clearly one of the attractions of joining this particular community for some residents. For example, from two different families:

A very well organised farming community compared with the others we looked at.

One of the things I think that impressed us was the degree of organisation here with a small "o" ... I don't think a community of this sort could survive for as long as it has ... unless there was a set of well organised practices.

Another resident spoke of transferring these practices to a daytime job outside the community:

Probably with me, I've used my Greenfields skills more in my work than the other way round ... I do admin and computer stuff. Because I administer the scheme, I run quite a lot of meetings and am constantly amazed at how awful some of the other meetings are because they're not structured in any way ... Our meetings here are much more effective. So I can nag them to try and structure their meetings more. And the way I run the ones I run I do it on Greenfields.



Greenfield's organisational framework of collective self-management can be broken down into the Coordinator role, the Farm Meeting, sub-groups, informal congregations, and decision-making.

### **The Coordinator Role**

Communities that wish to live and work within a framework of equality have to find some way to organise and coordinate communal tasks. Animals in particular demand routine; cows and goats require milking twice daily. At Greenfields, the farm work is divided into different areas including Fields, Garden, Sheep, Goats, Cows, and Poultry. A Coordinator is allocated to each area of farming responsibility. The Coordinator has responsibility for his/her particular area such as making sure cover is provided when milkers go away.

Iannello highlights a dilemma for organisations that attempt to avoid hierarchy:

"Such organizations may wish to allow leadership to develop naturally out of the skills and interests of its members. However, there is a danger that certain members may gain positions of power within the organization without those positions being formalized. Once such individuals develop power there is no procedural means of removing them from the position. Yet if positions are formalized, the organization runs the risk of becoming a hierarchy – what it was attempting to avoid." (1992:18)

Now, clearly, as Iannello points out there is a fine line between allocating positions of responsibility and implementing a managerial hierarchy to which one of the community members draws attention:

But it would be very easy to see us as hierarchical as well, in that each area has a coordinator. And although in practice that means that's the person who was bullied

into doing it, that person could easily say well having thought about it I don't want to do it. And it wouldn't require much to swing that mitre to make it hierarchical. So although we do things by consensus, or as near consensus as we can, we are not all involved in everything. Yes, there's too much to do, so you are quite happy to let someone else get on with it.

The consensual organisation endeavours to be egalitarian: “*any type of stratification is carefully created and monitored by the collectivity*” (Iannello, 1992:28). During the research period, the issue of whether rotation of the Coordinator role should be formalised came under discussion:

And a topic recently was about whether we should regularly change who held coordinator roles. Because there's nothing in our written policies or anything like that which covers that. Underneath that was the whole issue of influence, power if you like. Yes? And how that's distributed. So it could get tricky ... But it's something you have to be fairly sensitive to, that kind of area, because where does being effective and concerned become dominant, bullying, and all the rest of it.

Below, a community member identifies the strengths of the Coordinator role:

Amy, she's Cow Coordinator, doesn't make it set in stone that she's coordinator for ever. But you need a coordinator. You need somebody overall. It sounds a bit tyrannical but you need somebody to say “Right, Bluebell had the calf today”. You need somebody guiding everybody. So you just can't become a coordinator because she's got 12 years of knowledge gained over experience. And experience beats all your book learning.

The community members that I spoke to were quite positive on the whole about the Coordinator role. One found it easy to take on a vacant Coordinator role: “*And when Nick left, I quickly put my hand up to become Greenhouse Coordinator. I was*

*amazed that nobody else did. I thought there'd be a big rush".* Another, as a newcomer, identified a niche and created a Salad Coordinator role. One resident said:

If you're going to give somebody responsibility for the care of the field crops, then because they're going to put their time and energy into it, and you are not, you can let them do almost what they want.

Coordinators report on their areas of farming responsibility at the regular Farm Meeting.

### **The Farm Meeting**

As a self-managing community, Greenfields holds a weekly meeting that is organised to rotate around different aspects of community living. During Christmas, Easter and summer school holidays, meetings are postponed because often people go away with their children. The Farm Meeting therefore comes round once every four weeks in term-time only.

The procedure for Farm Meetings is codified. In similar fashion to Summerhill, the Farm Meeting has a Chair and a Secretary and these roles are rotated. To initiate a farming change, a community member submits a proposal to the next Farm Meeting. It is up to individuals to self-regulate by choosing whether to bring up a matter of concern or let it go. The procedure is that any resident who wants to bring up an issue talks with the Farm Chair or Secretary at least one week before the meeting and submits the issue in the form of a proposal, together with any supporting information. Proposals are attached to the Agenda which goes up on one of the boards a week prior to the meeting.



At the Farm Meeting, the Farm Chair reads out the proposals in turn. For what is perceived by all to be a sensible minor change with no potential repercussions, a proposal might be accepted without debate. Alternatively, community members may be divided about an issue. It often happens that, before being willing to commit to a decision, community members ask questions in which case the proposal might remain pending until the next meeting to provide an opportunity for information-collecting by the proposal-maker:

The Chair will then say "I suggest we form a sub-group. Go away, get all your facts and figures right and then come back with the answers". Because as we go round the room, firing questions at that person, they can't have all the answers. Any answers missing, you have this thing "Well, you know, you haven't done your research very well, we don't know the answer". It's a great time-saver.

A temporary sub-group therefore can form to meet up and return at the next meeting with more information and recommendations. Otherwise, if community members feel they would like a fuller discussion on the matter, the debate can be moved to the regular four-weekly Community meeting:

There isn't time in a monthly meeting to discuss a big issue because you've only got two hours. Realistically, by the time you've got to the meeting, read the minutes of the previous meeting, you've got less than two hours probably to get through the Agenda. So in practical terms you've got to hive off stuff whether it's to sub-group or if something that obviously involves a lot of discussion or controversy or argument, then it will probably go to a Community meeting. Sub-groups tend to be for something that a small number of people really interested in want to carry that forward. Community meeting is more for something that generates argument and discussion.

A proposal that goes away to a sub-group or Community meeting is brought back to a subsequent Farm Meeting to obtain a decision. Since decision-making is by consensus, the proposed change does not go ahead until everyone agrees.

In a relatively new initiative, the community now rules that decisions cannot be made after 10.30 p.m. It seems that in the community's history, some residents have been able to get their way through true grit and the ability to stay up late and argue:

When we first came here, whoever shouted longest and loudest won the day. And the meetings used to go on and on and on. Now we don't make decisions after 10.30 unless it's agreed by that meeting that we'll carry on an extra half an hour.

After a meeting, the Secretary produces the Minutes and attaches a copy to one of the notice boards.

The Farm Meeting procedures are provided to try and attain equitableness, as evidenced at the end of a document found in the ring-binder entitled 'Welcome to Greenfields: A Guide':

The above procedures are intended to ensure that all members get the chance to find out and think about proposals before a meeting, and to contribute to any decision that gets made.

## **Sub-Groups**

This section elaborates on the two types of sub-groups that have been referred to briefly; one type is permanent and the other type is temporary.

The first type of sub-group, which is the more permanent kind, is linked to one area of farming responsibility to which one or more Coordinators is assigned. This type of sub-group holds meetings to discuss one or more aspects of the particular area of expertise. An example given was that the Cow sub-group might meet up to discuss what to do about a non-pregnant cow following efforts to get her in calf. Below, a new resident reflects on the autonomy of this type of sub-group.

We do have coordinators for different tasks on the farm. One person will be in charge. Or a group of people, like a calves committee or a field committee. You know, there's all these different sub-groups. And whoever wants to get involved in those groups gets involved. And they have their own little meetings, they call a meeting, it's open to anybody and they might make recommendations within them. Then, those recommendations come to the general meeting, at which we can either say "yes" or "no". But I think those little groups can be quite autonomous, in a way. It's good.

The inference here is that this type of sub-group meeting is open to all residents. Advance notice of such a meeting is usually given to residents inside and outside the sub-group via a notice board, although another community member suggested that this is not always the case: *"But sometimes it's just because you assume no-one's interested. But something like a Cow Meeting, there's loads of cow milkers. That would definitely go up on the board. That's the easiest way to let people know what's happening"*. I failed to acquire a definitive answer about what criteria are used to decide whether or not a sub-group meeting should be advertised and also on what issues can be decided without being taken forward to a Farm Meeting. One resident suggested that spending money above a specified value is an issue that a sub-group would have to bring forward to a Farm Meeting. Clearly, though, if an



animal requires emergency treatment, then the Coordinator for that animal group takes responsibility and makes a decision promptly without waiting for a meeting.

The second type of sub-group can be instigated at a Farm Meeting on a temporary basis to do further research on a proposed Farm change. A sub-group enables further debate and provides an opportunity to collect more information in response to questions asked at the meeting. So, for example, a sub-group was set up recently to discuss the proposal to join the Soil Association. In this type of temporary sub-group, one person takes responsibility for organising the sub-group, deciding when to have meetings, and checking up on information. The sub-group cannot make decisions; the issue comes back to the Farm Meeting with recommendations: *"It has to go back to the Farm Meeting to sort of have its ideas ratified so everybody gets the chance to, if you haven't been at the sub-group, get a chance to have an influence on the decision"*.

### **Informal Congregations**

The decision-making process doesn't just come out of the blue. You know, one minute no-one's thought about it and the next minute we've got to make a decision. It doesn't happen like that. It arises, it gets recognised that we've got to do something about this whatever the issue is, it gets knocked about for quite a while out of meetings and that kind of thing. Yeah? So it's gradually resolved in that way.

Inevitably, discussion about current issues takes place outside the formalised framework. I asked about what sort of discussion takes place:

Well, all sorts. I mean, it's community life. It ranges from informal gossip to all sorts ... It would be impossible if all the business had to be done through meetings. You

know, a lot of things get worked out as you go along. I've only been here a year but it seems to me that it works quite well.

Several people mentioned lobbying going on outside meetings as a way of getting people on your side: "*Yes, so if you want to get something through, you lobby. You lobby your mates*". One person suggested that some people try to get other people to put forward their ideas: "*Some people don't like to take any responsibility for their desires, I suppose*". Other discussions are more spontaneous as people just happen to be in the same area simultaneously. The Buttery is prominent in this respect for this is where all the noticeboards and blackboards are located:

There are often unofficial sub groups taking place in the Buttery. If you go in there, someone sees something on the board and someone else will join them and there's a big discussion about that note on the board.

Meetings tend to provoke subsequent discussion:

Or if there's been some particularly hot topic in a meeting. After the meeting or the next morning, you might talk to someone "What do you think about such and such?" Often somebody's walking by and they join in.

One person benefits from having a partner with whom to talk things over:

Yes, so I think it makes a big difference that you can talk about issues after a meeting. I've been to plenty of meetings which were quite tense about something or other. Or something happened that I was unhappy about and Judy too. And if you talk about them before you go to bed and stuff and resolve them at bit, you know that can help you.

Another highlighted the role of informal discussion in the more formal decision-making processes:

Well I think it can have a big role. So, for instance, sometimes if you have a proposal, you go and talk about it to people. Some people go and talk to their friends. Some people go and talk to the people who they think will agree. Some people will deliberately go and talk to people they think won't agree, so they can raise issues and maybe you can deal with them ahead of the meeting. All of those things happen. Yeah, sometimes those things are incredibly important. Sometimes people will come up with compromises outside of the meeting.

## **Decision Making**

Decision-making on farming issues at Greenfields is by consensus at the four-weekly Farm Meeting. Drawing on work carried out by Rothschild and Whitt (1986), Iannello (1992:27-31) identifies the features of consensual organisation as an ideal type as follows. Rules are minimal and are based on a substantive ethics. Where there is division of labour, no distinction is made between intellectual work and manual work. Social control is based on peer pressure, although Iannello contends that this is not a problem for homogeneous groups. Consensus decision-making can be either time-consuming or can move very quickly, depending upon the nature of the issue.

At Greenfields, anyone who does not attend the meeting can have a say by notifying the Farm Chair or Secretary in writing. A proposed change does not go ahead if one or more residents raises an objection, although individuals tend to acquiesce if nobody else objects: *"If one person disagrees, we won't go ahead with that, unless that person says 'Just minute that I disagree, but I'll go with the majority!'" That often happens*". When an initial rejection occurs, the proposal is not



necessarily thrown out. It may return to subsequent meetings for another show of hands, after having been investigated further by a sub-group set up for the purpose or following discussion at a Community meeting. Consequently, a proposal can provoke much debate over an issue before a decision is made: *"Often now, if I put something up that I expect to be controversial, I don't expect any action at the first meeting and I'm fine with that. You just kind of have to give people a chance to get used to it"*. On occasions, debate takes place over a duration of some months. In one case, over a non-farming issue, it took years before a decision was made. This is especially true where community members are almost equally divided over an issue.

One Greenfields resident described decision-making as "painful consensus". When I asked "Why?", s/he replied: *"Because one person can block something. Everyone can agree but one person can block it"*. Another resident elaborated as follows:

It favours the status quo. So if you want to change something, then you bring in a proposal and at that point anybody who, in theory because we make decisions by consensus, can veto it and can say "I don't agree". And then, you know, it will all stay the same as it's been. So there's a kind of bias towards the status quo really I suppose ... Well, for example, if we were trying to decide whether or not to grow wheat again and the sub-group talked it all over and said "Let's not grow wheat, waste of time!". Went back to the Farm Meeting and said "We recommend that we don't grow wheat any more". Somebody else says "I disagree". Then that wouldn't get through because that's not the status quo. The status quo is that we grow wheat ... But, in theory, anybody can block a change. And it doesn't happen very often because in fact if most people want to do it and one person doesn't, they usually back down. But in theory they can.

This is a feature of consensus that does not appear on Rothschild and Whitt's list (1986): that consensus favours the status quo, thus rendering the consensual organisation as resistant to change.

Another significant issue, taken from Rothschild and Whitt (1986), is that a consensual setting invokes greater emotional intensity:

"Consensual organisations provide face-to-face communication and consideration of the total needs of the individual. As a result, conflict within the organization may exact a much higher personal cost; individuals are held more accountable for their actions." (Iannello, 1992:29-30)

Clearly, when individuals are not only working together but also living together in a community setting, the potential for emotional intensity is enhanced. In caring for their organic or not-so-organic selves, how do community members deal with this heightened intensity that is not so much present in bureaucratic organisations? To help answer this question, I analyse next individual self-regulation and power relations through the lens of the care of the self practice of *parrhesia*.

### **Parrhesia: Free Speech**

In a similar way to the functioning of Summerhill School (Neill, 1937), a principle of self-regulation and the promotion of free speech prevails at this farming community, contrasting with the rule- and hierarchy-boundedness of modernist organisations. In this section, power relations at this micro site are studied through the concept of free speech (*parrhesia*), which is a care of the self practice that Foucault unearths from the Ancient Greeks and Romans (Foucault, 2001a). Debate is a fundamental ingredient of the consensus decision-making process within the context of the non-hierarchical organisation that operates at Greenfields. In this section, I analyse the

debates that arise related to organic farming practices through the care of the self practice of *parrhesia*.

Whilst Foucault acknowledges that there are different versions of *parrhesia*. *Parrhesia* is commonly taken to mean "telling the truth". Again, this truth is not an absolute truth, but instead something that is true to the speaker, referred to as the *parrhesiastes*. The *parrhesiastes*, "*is someone who says everything he has in mind: he does not hide anything, but opens his heart and mind completely to other people through his discourse*" (Foucault, 1983:12). In contrast to the rhetorical device of long speeches, *parrhesia* flourishes through the technique of dialogue (20). *Parrhesia* is not a care of the self practice that one can carry out alone, for it is embedded in social practices. Foucault provides a general synopsis of how the word *parrhesia* is used in Greek texts between Fifth Century BC and Fifth Century AD:

"*parrhesia* is a kind of verbal activity where the speaker has a specific relation to truth through frankness ... More precisely, *parrhesia* is a verbal activity in which a speaker expresses his personal relationship to truth, and risks his life because he recognizes truth-telling as a duty to improve or help other people (as well as himself). In *parrhesia*, the speaker uses his freedom and chooses frankness instead of persuasion, truth instead of falsehood or silence, the risk of death instead of life and security, criticism instead of flattery, and moral duty instead of self-interest and moral apathy." (Foucault, 2001a:19-20, emphases in original)

*Parrhesia* stands in opposition to rhetoric (Foucault, 2001a:20). In *parrhesia*, the speaker makes it clear that s/he is expressing her/his own opinion. The speaker speaks her/his mind so clearly that the audience is almost able to read the speaker's mind: "*And he does this by avoiding any kind of rhetorical form which*



would veil what he thinks. Instead the parrhesiastes uses the most direct words and forms of expression he can find" (Foucault, 2001a:12, emphasis in original).

*Parrhesia* is also regarded as an art of life (*technē tou biou*) (23) which, to recap from Chapter 3, is the art of existence. Barratt (2003a:1079) refers to an aesthetics of existence as "*the idea of a distinctive, reflective manner of styling one's own life*". The art of existence equates to the concept of having a personal ethos. Accordingly, for empowerment, a human subject uses the power relations invested in her/his self. Luxon (2004) also sees Foucault's aesthetics of existence as a way of shaping one's life independently of following a law:

"Foucault's aesthetics of existence is characterized by a care for beauty, for *éclat*, for perfection. This aesthetics requires a continuous reworking ... and constitutes a morality which 'essentially seeks out (*recherche*) a personal ethics [rather than] a morality that is obedience to a system of rules' ... Foucault explains, 'The objective of this truth-telling is the fashioning (*formation*) of a certain manner of being, of a certain manner of acting, of a certain manner of conducting oneself alone or with others. The objective of truth-telling is less the health of the city than the ethos of the individual'." (Luxon, 2004:477-8, emphasis in original)

In this extract, Luxon cites Foucault firstly from 'Une esthétique de l'existence' in Foucault (2001b), pp1550-51. Secondly, she cites from Foucault (1984c).

How do Greenfields residents harness the power relations within their selves to speak out about organic farming practices?

## **Speaking Out**

*Parrhesia* is speaking out openly about the particular truth that one believes in. When two or more people put forward their particular truths, a debate ensues in the

form of a *parrhesiastic* truth game. Residents who work in hierarchy-based organisations welcome the free discussion that takes place at Greenfields:

I'd say, compared to my work situation, it's very good. Work is very clearly laid out and it's very obvious. You know, in my line of work, meetings are just a formality. Meetings are just there to decorate a decision you've made already. But here, there's genuine discussion.

The previous chapter showed how Greenfields residents were divided about whether or not to re-join the Soil Association as certified producers. One resident identifies the function of speaking out in an attempt to steer the collective way towards one's individual preferences:

But there are people who want us to join whatever happens, so we've got to be ready to talk it out, I think. You know, I'm going to talk as long as I can.

To the individual, some issues matter more than others. A number of residents said that speaking out is linked to how strongly one feels about an issue.

But also if somebody feels very strongly about something, then they'll be more forceful. They may not even be particularly articulate, but they will be very forceful in how they put their point across. They'll put more emotion into it.

Often, then, whether or not a community member speaks up depends on what particular aspects of the farming s/he is involved with. Also, through having a particularly organic self, some people feel compelled to speak out about non-organic practices:

So when we have noticed things that go against our feelings of what organic is, then we have tried to bring it to people's attention and get people to review it. But we have had some rather nasty shocks!

It does not follow that others will also believe that one has a right to speak out. The next section explores who has the right to speak.

### **Who Has the Right to Speak?**

In Ancient Greece, the use of *parrhesia* was restricted to male citizens. Women and slaves did not have the right to use *parrhesia*. Not only did one have to be a citizen, but “*one must be one of the best among the citizens, possessing those specific personal, moral, and social qualities which grant one the privilege to speak*” (Foucault, 2001a:18, emphasis in original).

*Parrhesia* was an essential characteristic of Athenian democracy, taking place on a one-to-one basis and also within groups: “*we can say quite generally that parrhesia was a guideline for democracy as well as an ethical and personal attitude characteristic of the good citizen*” (Foucault, 2001a:22). Foucault relates how *parrhesia* becomes problematised during the Fourth Century BC (71-74). In Euripides' *Orestes*, written or performed in 408 BC, *parrhesia* becomes “*split within itself*” (73) into positive *parrhesia* and negative *parrhesia*, or “*ignorant outspokenness*” (73). This problematisation raises questions about who is entitled to use *parrhesia* and whether to grant exclusive use of *parrhesia* to some citizens only according to social status or personal virtue. The paradox is that in democracy everyone is considered to be equal and therefore all forms of *parrhesia* should be given equal place:



“For the Greeks the discovery of this problem, of a necessary antinomy between *parrhesia* – freedom of speech – and democracy, inaugurated a long impassioned debate concerning the precise nature of the dangerous relations which seemed to exist between democracy, *logos*, freedom, and truth”. (2001a:77)

Foucault concludes that real *parrhesia* “*in its positive, critical sense*” cannot exist where democracy exists (83). Subsequently, the problem of freedom of speech becomes related increasingly to choice of way of life or *bios*:

“And as a result, *parrhesia* is regarded more and more as a personal attitude, a personal quality, as a virtue which is useful for the city’s political life in the case of positive or critical *parrhesia*, or as a danger for the city in the case of negative, pejorative *parrhesia*.” (85)

I argue that, in this self-managing community, every resident has the right to engage in *parrhesia* although individuals may or may not allow themselves the freedom of free speech. An opportunity to speak up is there for everybody to take at formal and informal congregations. If a community member decides to keep quiet, then that is that person’s choice. I contend therefore that it is always the power relations within one’s self that regulate one’s free speech statements. Nevertheless, within this context of self-regulation, the research finds that residents have particular viewpoints on the rights of others to speak.

Regarding women, one community member had experienced a silencing of women whilst visiting another community: “*And even though the women were highly competent, doctors and you know all professional women who could hold their own professionally, but in meetings they felt shouted down by very strong men*”.

At Greenfields, both men and women felt silenced by other residents:

You're shouted down. Not shouted down, he just talks on and on and on. And he won't listen to what you say.

Personalities always come into it obviously. It often depends who's at a meeting and who speaks loudest. I have to say that does happen. I think it's inevitable.

And when you're sitting in the meetings, there are some people who can say "No" with a very loud voice and they seem to have more votes in the consensus than people who say "No" very softly. Or "Yes" very softly.

This last quote suggests that, by not speaking up, one might be perceived incorrectly as agreeing to a consensus. It would seem then that consensus can be presumed if nobody disagrees. But to disagree, one has to stand up in front of everyone else and make a stand:

I know a lot of things have happened at the community that I don't agree with, you know, but there wasn't enough people that had my viewpoint to stop it. So nothing has ever come up that I knew enough about and that I disagreed with that I felt that I wanted to, but didn't, stand up and say "No way, I'm not going to let that happen". And I've never said "No way, I don't care that all the rest of you agree, I'm not going to let that happen". That never happens ... But I have definitely seen things ... that I didn't agree with. I didn't feel it was my place to step up.

Two community members said that the Chair is in a position to influence things one way or another:

I'm not sure that I was a particularly good Chair because I always had a view on the issues and I did used to make my view felt. But I didn't feel that that was influencing it. But maybe in retrospect I probably shouldn't have made my views so felt.

I think the Chair probably has a more decisive role than other people ... You know, people express three or four different opinions and the Chair - it's hard to sum that up for instance. So the Chair might say "Well we'll do it for six months" or something like that. And so they have a decisive role in that process. Sometimes, not always.

One person said that the Secretary had influence:

Actually, the person that's taking the minutes is a very important person. I mean, when I was the Secretary if it's something you're very interested in, you make sure that you minute it. And sometimes subconsciously you don't minute things that you think are a waste of time.

Non-attendance is another factor that affects one's right to speak at a Farm Meeting. A potential absentee can forward their views to a meeting via a written note. One resident at least believed that this method is not necessarily effective: *"But your views are not likely to carry as much weight as if you say it"*.

There are people who are listened to because they are believed to have expertise in a particular farming area and these people are often the Coordinators:

There are key people who are key to the running of the farm and they cover lots of areas. So lots of us feel quite deferential to them because they know more. And my position would always be if somebody knows more then, unless I've got a very strong reason for objecting, I trust them to make decisions.

Another person acknowledged deferring to those who have resided for longer at Greenfields:

There are people who have retained, I would say, some sort of seniority just from the length of time that they've been here. Well, they've got the experience and the



length of vision and whatever. So, I think, probably, there is some idea of – I don't know that seniority is necessarily the right word. But the longer you've been here, obviously that counts for something ... And I think you've got acknowledged experts in certain fields ... So it's a question of having specialist knowledge or knowledge gained over a long period of time.

The Coordinator role is linked to expertise since anyone who has spent, say, six years specialising in a particular farming area is likely to have accumulated knowledge on what practices work best in that area:

In theory, it's consensus, yeah? In practice, of course, we all have areas of special interest. So that, for example, if we had to make a decision about what to do about this year's potato crop, yeah? But there's somebody else here who's particularly interested and active in growing potatoes so, in practice, it would be his decision ... One of the big decisions that the potato man has to make is what variety to grow. Yeah? He knows probably what opinions are held strongly by some people and he'll try and go along with that. If that variety wasn't available for some reason or another, he would probably go and talk with that person who he knew had a strong opinion about it and see if, in those circumstances, that person might agree or not. So there are many subtle variations. And you would eventually come to a conclusion. He might even make a decision, but he would then account for himself at the next Farm Meeting ... He would say "I've done this because I knew you could do it then. This is why I did it." So, if you disagree, tough luck! But we would respect the fact that he's doing his best ... I have no say in what potatoes to grow. I don't particularly like potatoes. I'm not particularly interested in potatoes. So I'm quite happy for someone else to make all the decisions there. But it wouldn't be fair to say that I have as much say in deciding what potatoes we grow as other people, because it's not true ... So it depends on the issue.

Some newcomers are quite willing to defer to the way things are currently done at Greenfields:

It's been going for 25 years. So who am I to come in saying "you should be doing it this way", "you should be doing it this way" - it's their way of doing things.

Two more newcomers are willing to acknowledge that they have lots to learn:

I think because we hadn't been farmers as such and we hadn't a lot of farming experience, I think I speak for Tom too, we feel we're here to learn and so we'll listen to everybody else. We won't try and impose. Because I mean I know nothing about field stuff, I've never driven a tractor. You know. I hope that will come eventually. So we just listen and we note that there are umpteen ways of doing the same job. And that's because there are umpteen people here. And so there's a lot of negotiation around how you do any job, which is fine, because that's what it's about.

However, not every newcomer is prepared to opt out:

So he's come in and he's been quite vocal from an early stage. So other people say "Who does he think he is? He doesn't know. He doesn't have a right. And I have an issue with us saying "When does somebody have a right to be vocal?" So most people who come in are deferential and do sit and think "When I have more knowledge, I will." But what if somebody comes in and they are really experienced? Well, actually, if they're paying all their contributions, who are we to say when they have a right to say or when they have a right to challenge.

Inevitably, the people who have lived and farmed at the community in the long-term resist new challenges initially and voice those words that have almost become a cliché in organisations "*But that's the way we've always done it!*". But, then, as a

longer-term resident points out, some of the residents have heard the issues raised before: *"But it's been gone over three years ago or four years ago and, you know, oh Gosh, it's up again, for heaven's sake"*. In this interesting mix of the synchronic and the diachronic, discussed in the previous chapter, the new person's history clashes with the history of the community in a frozen moment at a community meeting. But, as pointed out by one long-term resident, it is possible to change people's minds if you speak up: *"you'd have to argue it strongly to convince us"*.

The issue of the udder cream illustrates how someone new can challenge a longstanding practice and get it changed. Udder cream is intended for use after milking to help keep the udder supple. Two people have told me that the label on the udder cream instructed users to wash off the udder cream applied at the previous milking before milking again. A newcomer who was knowledgeable about organic was surprised to see milkers apply the cream immediately prior to milking: *"Putting a little bit on their hands and a bit on their fingers and they were using it to get a lubricated teat"*. This practice had been questioned previously by one community member but had continued for years. The newcomer rang up the udder cream manufacturer and spoke to a vet:

I phoned up the company who made it and I asked the vet – they put a vet on the phone. And I said "look we're using this product for milking on the udders, is it OK?" ... And he phoned me back and said "Well, no, if it gets into the milk, you have to throw the milk away". He told me the chemical that was in it and he said "Oh, you don't want to be eating that". "

The two concerned people found a solution by arranging for a local herbalist to make up a herbal version of the udder cream. This instance shows how a newcomer, with persistence, can persuade longer-standing community members to



acquiesce, but only if an alternative can be presented. It demonstrates how the newcomer's previous experiences, in the diachronic, clash with what is happening in the present at the community, in the synchronic; and how longer-standing community members are confronted with a clash between the community's diachronic past and synchronic present which is particularly dynamic when new people come in: *"So without people like me or new people coming in, things can just - because it's always happened, the big argument: "Well, we've always done it that way, fine, no problem"*. On the other hand, it was observed that the majority of newcomers during the research study are willing to sit quietly and fit in, thereby not engaging in *parrhesia*.

### Telling the Truth

*Parrhesia* is a way of speaking the truth: "To my mind, the *parrhesiastes* says what is true because he knows that it is true; and he knows that it is true because it is really true" (Foucault, 2001a:14, emphases in original). *Parrhesia* is characterised by frankness and "an exact coincidence between belief and truth" (Foucault, 2001a:14). That is, the *parrhesiastes* is not only subject to what s/he is saying but is also subject to her/his belief in what s/he is saying. In other words, engaging in *parrhesia* involves being true to oneself. Rather than following an authority from outside, one acts according to one's own personal authority. A community member elaborates on acting according to personal authority rather than the received authority: *"There are good practices and I like to follow those but I have to have some awareness of why we're doing those practices, not just a blind following of those practices"*.

Luxon (2004) links *parrhesia* with authority but, unlike the modern institutionally defined authority of the expert, *parrhesiastic* authority is embedded within a social

context: “By emphasising context, Foucault obliges the audience to consider the *parrhesiastes* on his own terms; neither his authority nor his ethical virtue can be ascribed to a rule-bound ethics” (469). The chance to contribute a personal ethics through free speech is valued by residents who work in hierarchies:

I still think it's great though because I'm a governor at the school. And you sit on a meeting there when it's not about consensus and there are all these other kind of hierarchies and you're in a group where actually a group decision isn't being made because it's already been made outside. And our meetings are by contrast very open and of course there's all kind of stuff gone on outside the meeting. But, you know, you can go in there and say what you want to say whether or not you know someone's going to bite your head off. You probably know who's going to bite your head off anyway. It does feel quite open and you know that you have to be responsible.

The person who engages in *parrhesia* has a different relation to truth to the scientist or bureaucrat who is produced through scientific or bureaucratic procedures (Luxon, 2004). Whereas *parrhesiastic* speech “is evidence of the speaker's own virtue and the nature of his soul” (469), the modern-day expert's virtue is borrowed through adopting a certain professional persona, such as objective neutrality, that is validated by others outside oneself. *Parrhesiastic* speech, on the other hand, is self-regulated:

“The *parrhesiastes*, by contrast, is not sustained through reference to a virtuous order external to social practices. Instead, parrhesiastic techniques are dominated by the particularistic qualities and virtues of the individual *parrhesiastes*, those that together form a composite attitude, manner or disposition.” (469)

Everyone has their own truth, though. Accordingly, in a community setting, there are multiple truths:

When you're on your own, you think your opinion is right. When you're making a decision on your own in your own little world, your decision is right because that's the only one. But when you've got 17/18 families involved or people, their decisions are always right.

Multiple truths produce *parrhesiastic* truth games over organic farming practices, as illustrated by the issue of the enviro-mesh. A relative newcomer carried out some research on enviro-mesh, a gauze-like material that can be placed over crops to suppress pests and vermin:

And I've got some photographs that are upstairs and they show you the difference covered and uncovered ... And you could see the difference. The rabbits and the pigeons and the snails and the flea beetle – whoosh! – were just clearing the field. So for the first five or six weeks we wanted to cover the kale, kick the animals off it, give them a good start, take the cover off.

An observer reported that this person thought long and hard about the issue before putting in a proposal to spend £600 approximately on enviro-mesh to protect the beet and kale that are fed as fodder crops to the animals. Another relative newcomer blocked the proposal. The observer went on to report on the reactions of other people community members:

But interesting with the enviro-mesh. I thought this was a really interesting one because the person who objected to it is a vegetarian and he's only been here a year. Now he objected to it because he said the enviro-mesh costs £600, it was about £600, and he said "But that's a lot of money when we're just protecting fodder crops for the cows; it's actually a luxury food item; it's not essential to their diet. So



why are we spending £600 on enviro-mesh for animals?" ... The objection was "this is somebody who's only just arrived here and he's got a big mouth on him". And actually, you know, he is allowed to say "£600 is a lot of money, I don't think it's an essential crop"; and £600 could do an awful lot in the garden for human consumption, direct human consumption, rather than through the animal.

This observer recalls the reluctance of some community members to allow newcomers to have an equal say in decision-making, as highlighted in the previous section. The other interesting aspect of this event is that it is a vegetarian who blocks the proposal to spend £600 on feeding animals that s/he will not eat. This case highlights a *parrhesiastic* truth game arising from a difference in eating habits that is not necessarily related to organic but one, nevertheless, that has implications for organic farming practices.

### **Taking a Risk**

"When you accept the parrhesiastic game ... you are taking up a specific relationship to yourself ... instead of reposing in the security of a life where the truth goes unspoken ... The *parrhesiastes* primarily chooses a specific relationship to himself: he prefers himself as a truth-teller rather than as a living being who is false to himself." (Foucault, 2001a:17)

Engaging in *parrhesia* involves taking a risk in telling the truth and is therefore dangerous, requiring courage and the desire to be a truth-teller rather than be false to oneself. As Luxon says: "*Parrhesiastic speech gives an agonistic, risky character to the confrontation between truth-teller and audience – one lacking in relationships between modern truth-tellers*" (2004:465). This risk that one takes is not necessarily a risk of losing your life; it can be the risk you run in hurting a friend by speaking the truth: "*In such a case, you do not risk your life, but you may hurt him by your*

remarks, and your friendship may consequently suffer for it" (16). Foucault provides an example (23-24) of Socrates demonstrating the role of *parrhesiastes* in Plato's writings (Alcibiades Majoras). Whereas Alcibiades' sycophantic friends and lovers flatter him in an attempt to gain favours, Socrates risks provoking Alcibiades' anger by telling Alcibiades that he must learn to take care of himself before he can learn to take care of Athens (24).

The *parrhesiastic* game can be a dangerous one:

"The danger always comes from the fact that the said truth is capable of hurting or angering the *interlocutor*" ... The *parrhesia* involved, for example, may be the advice that the interlocutor should behave in a certain way, or that he is wrong in what he thinks, or in the way he acts, and so on." (17).

It is up to the individual then through self-regulation to decide whether to speak up, to say: "*This is the way you behave, but that is the way you ought to behave*" (17) or to keep quiet and avoid the risk of offending a friend. Below, a resident risks offending another resident through engaging in *parrhesia*:

I made some marmalade the other day and offered a jar to one of the people here and he turned it down because the oranges weren't organic. Oranges don't come from this country, you know - how do you know they're organic? I think that's where it shocked me to think that somebody has gone that far into "organic".

As suggested in the previous chapter, however, I contend that different ontologies towards organic lie at the root of many confrontations.

One may also risk upsetting a friend through *parrhesia* by taking a position of opposition during a debate:

I notice people that I am friendly with - they don't always argue on my behalf or in my favour in meetings. And I think that's very healthy.

On the other hand, community members may choose to avoid the risk involved in exercising *parrhesia*:

Well I think there are lots of things that people would like to change that don't get put to the meeting ... Partly it's just whether you think that people will find it palatable. You know, there are certain things that people would like to see happen that they never bring into the meeting because it might upset somebody.

### **Criticism of Oneself or Another**

*Parrhesia* functions as criticism of oneself or another. Through *parrhesia*, one tells another what s/he should do and what s/he should not do; what s/he should think and what s/he should not think; what s/he has done wrong. Telling the truth through *parrhesia* is regarded as a duty to point out another's wrong-doing: "*no one forces him to speak, but he feels that it is his duty to do so*" (Foucault, 2001a:19).

During a visit, one of the large blackboards in the Buttery displayed two criticisms of others:

PARSNIPS are not yet on the board for picking.

Please do not give any spinach, chard or beet tops to goats (chard leaves were found in kids' pen today)

Messages written on the board are often anonymous, as were these. Are these then acts of *parrhesia*? Perhaps a face-to-face confrontation provides a better



example of a *parrhesiastic* act. Below, a resident relates being criticised openly by a particularly organic community member:

Anyway, I was walking past Woolworth's and some plants jumped out at me, so I bought them. And I was planting them along the front here and Martin told me off about it. Saying "Are they organic plants?" I didn't know you could get organic plants!

To recap, I contend that confrontations such as these arise from differences in organic subjectivities. Reflecting on organic farming at Greenfields, one resident puts it like this:

You've got to have the mindset. And there's enough people here. People, they're riding on your shoulders like and "do this and do that!". You've got to have an individual conscious and you've got to have a collective conscious so, you know. It's difficult really.

Another way that *parrhesia* can be used is to criticise oneself: "*This is what I have done, and was wrong in so doing*" (Foucault, 20001a:17). The Greenfields Buttery holds examples of self-criticism in the self-help ring binders that sit on the library shelves and which are readily available to anyone visiting the Buttery. In the following account, extracted from the Legumes ring-binder, a community member makes her/his actions visible to others through self-criticism that is a form of *parrhesia* that here is embodied in self-writing:

Paul's Legumes 2002

The worst things I did – failed to keep beans wet enough in the late summer drought which caused early end to crop. Grew too many beans to keep picked.

and an extract from the Root Crops ring-binder:

Roots – Sadia's Part of Plot 4 2000/2001

[extract]

Generally a difficult year – very cold and wet early on, loads of tiny slugs nibbled up all the seedlings, I didn't rake the soil for the early sowings into a fine enough tilth and also I sowed the seeds too deeply. So I had to resow each bed about 3 times. Eventually the nodules in early summer were very successful.

The shelves on which these ring-binders are located are used to store various books and other documentation for collective use that serve as a modern version of hupomnemata, which is another care of the self practice that Foucault uncovered. Hupomnemata are guides for conduct such as account books, public registers and individual notebooks that were in common use two thousand years ago (Foucault, 2000d:209):

"One wrote down quotes in them, extracts from books, examples, and actions that one had witnessed or read about, reflections or reasonings that one had heard or that had come to mind. They constituted a material record of things read, heard, or thought, thus offering them up as a kind of accumulated treasure for subsequent rereading and meditation." (Foucault, 2000d:209)

Hupomnemata are kept near at hand so that they can be used in action when needed. They correspond to a combination of the traditional authority provided by the already said, such as books on organic farming and wisdoms handed down through an oral tradition, and one's own particular circumstances (Foucault, 2000d:212).

The self-written ring-binders in the Buttery contain declarations of where someone went wrong and what they would do next time, as this extract from the Root Crops ring-binder shows:

Fennel Bulb

Varieties were Romanesco and Argos. 200 planted in Nodules in March and April. 100 planted in June.

Suffered from slugs until established. I used to go out and manually pick off slugs in evening or early morning, keeping an eye on them for the first two weeks or so. Fennel tended to flower (bolt) early rather than really fatten up but was edible and tasty even when just bolted.

Next time I would plant 50 every 2 weeks from Mid-March until June 1 (or 100 plants beginning of each month, April-June).

The self-help ring binders act as memory-joggers for both the writer and others at the community and demonstrate a useful tool for knowledge sharing at a cooperative community.

### **Requires Courage**

"The fact that a speaker says something dangerous – different from what the majority believes – is a strong indication that he is a *parrhesiastes*" (Foucault, 2001a:15)

Throughout *Fearless Speech*, Foucault refers to the *parrhesiastes* requiring courage. Foucault views the exercise of courage as a kind of proof that the *parrhesiastes* is sincere in what s/he says. The *parrhesiastes* is courageous enough to tell the truth to other people (143). Speaking up within a group of people with whom one lives and works requires varying degrees of courage and this is more so if what one says goes against the majority: "You have to be quite tough to live here. To survive anyway".



Residents who hold managerial posts are more likely to be well-practised in taking part in meetings as part of their working lives. Others may not be so well rehearsed at articulating themselves. One resident I spoke to feels that s/he fits into this latter category:

There's people that earn their living in committees and there's people like me that don't. You know, that's their life, committees and talking and stuff. So you've either got to learn or you've got to take their decisions. You've gotta get in there and put your point of view over. And I find it difficult, I do. It's a bit intimidating.

Self-regulatory efforts to voice one's opinion and implement a change are not confined to meetings, however. There is plenty of scope for relative newcomers to learn how to "play the system" through thorough preparation, as the following resident points out:

But also some people just aren't as able to put forward their views coherently and neatly. So that's a skill and I think it's a useful skill that you learn here after a while. If you want to get anything done your way, you've kind of got to. And it is important to know how to use the process because if you discuss it with people in advance, put something up in writing that they can read, make them understand where you're coming from, almost always people say "Oh, yeah, that's OK then". But if it comes as a shock or it isn't explained properly, then you'll get blocked all the time. So it is really important to be able to use the meetings, you know, the whole system really, effectively.

Upon moving in, one resident had been concerned about the amount of chemicals s/he had seen on the farm and surroundings and thought of a constructive way to obtain a collective decision on which chemicals to use in the future by codifying permissible chemicals in a 'Chemical List'. S/he began by compiling a list of all the

chemicals observed on the farm and surroundings. Another resident observed: *"It was mostly stuff that gets used on the animals because we don't use anything on the plants"*. By compiling the list, the instigator was able to establish which chemicals were no longer used and arrange for them to be disposed of. An observer recounts:

So we've got a complete list now of anything that could be called a chemical, used as a medicine or whatever. So everybody knows what's used and, if they've got a problem with it, they can bring it to a meeting.

Some practices facilitate truth-telling more than others. One resident said about the Farm Meeting: *"Inevitably, some people with loud voices say more but, if the chairing is done properly, that shouldn't make a huge difference"*. At a Farm Meeting, I observed the Chair addressing community members as a whole to ask for feedback on a proposal put forward at the meeting. Not everybody spoke. At a later date, I observed a new Farm Chair asking each resident in turn for a response on whether to re-join the Soil Association, thus ensuring that everyone present circulated their thoughts on the matter. In a discussion afterwards between the Chair and myself, s/he informed me that some people are better at getting their voices heard than others and therefore the tactic adopted was a deliberate one to ensure that everyone spoke up.

One thing that inspires confidence and gives someone the courage to speak up in a particular context is being involved in, and having expertise in, a particular farming area. As one coordinator said:

And if somebody said "Why are you doing this?" then I would have an answer for it or I would have to listen, so you know, "How many times a year or if ever do we use

formaldehyde to do their feet?”. And if somebody objects to that, I can either give a defence or I can say “OK, we’ll look at alternatives and the rest of it”. But, yes, I would be vocal on the sheep. I might have nothing to say about whether we keep a billy goat.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter focused on studying how the lack of internal coherence within the organic discourse at this particular micro centre of power-knowledge, Greenfields, impinges upon the practices carried out by this group of organic food producers in trying to find a common way to farm. I began by deciding that, contrary to notions of utopia, practices are more fundamental to community life than sharing an ideology. Rather than there being a specific communal ideology, it was found that the different subjectivisation-objectivisations of individuals towards organic provoked differences of opinion on farming practices and subsequent debate.

In a similar way to the functioning of Summerhill School (Neill, 1962), a principle of self-regulation and the promotion of free speech was found to prevail at this self-managing organic cooperative community, contrasting with the hierarchy-bound nature of many organisations and, indeed, some communities today. The highly-structured organising practices established collectively at this farming community provided opportunities for every individual to engage in the decision-making process and influence organic farming practices.

It was decided that there was actually nothing to stop individuals from speaking out about farming practices except the individuals themselves. The practice of speaking out was analysed through *parrhesia* (free speech), a care of the self practice that Foucault draws upon from the Ancient Greeks and Romans of two thousand years ago. Through *parrhesia*, one speaks the truth. There are understood to be multiple



truths about organic operating at Greenfields which provoke so much debate. Speaking out one's truth when others hold different truths requires courage. And courage can emanate from how much one cares. How likely residents are to engage in *parrhesia* is linked to their degree of involvement with the particular farming area under discussion. Also, if a resident has a more intense subjectification towards organic than others, s/he is incited to speak up about non-organic farming practices. There are certain people who are credited with expertise who are more likely to be listened to. As occurred in Ancient Greece, though, certain people are understood by others not to enjoy the same privileges of free speech. In particular, newcomers are frowned upon for speaking out against longer-standing community members. Longstanding residents try and hold onto the existing way of doing things whilst some new members wish to make changes to align the community with their own organic selves. Also, some residents feel shouted down by others. It is feasible that some decisions that appear to go forward on consensus would have been challenged by individuals if they had had the *parrhesiastic* courage to speak out.

*Parrhesia* involves taking a risk and examples were found of community members risking offending their neighbours by pointing out their non-organic wrong-doings. *Parrhesia* also implies a level of criticism, which may be aimed at other people or at oneself. Notebooks were found in which individual community members had written in detail about their organic farming practices, where they had gone wrong, and what they would do next time. These notebooks are being used in the same way as hupomnemata, another care of the self practice.

Finally, it was established that it is possible to run an organisation successfully in which authority is personal and comes from inside the individual rather than imposed from outside by another. Collective self-management results in continuous

discussion and negotiation over farming practices that produces ever-changing ethical selves in a dynamic process through which existing practices can be challenged and new practices brought in.

This chapter is presented as the last empirical part of the doctoral research. In the next and final chapter I summarise the findings of this doctoral research and pinpoint some ways forward.

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<sup>1</sup> During the 1970s, it is alleged that Eileen Caddy heard the voice of God and her husband Peter Caddy implemented the will of God: "*The organisational style was that typically associated with the rule of a charismatic leader*" (Rigby, 1974:121). Authority was organised hierarchically, with each area of activity having a single person in charge and Peter Caddy, now deceased, as overall coordinator (Rigby, 1974:123). All decisions were made by Peter Caddy or by Heads of Departments appointed by him and only then after they had consulted Caddy (Rigby, 1974:125). The justification given for non-consensus decision-making was that it would have been impossible administratively to allow everyone to have an equal voice in a community of more than 100 members (Rigby, 1974:132-3). Today, the community is made up of several hundred people. Eileen Caddy, Findhorn's co-founder, continues to be directed by guidance from God on what to do with the community.

<sup>2</sup> In *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault (1984a:8) acknowledges how much he has benefited from the work of Peter Brown.

<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, it should be noted that Summerhill is not a classless society. Summerhill is a fee-paying private school that is not funded by the State. Annual fees range from £5,481 to £11,166 (Griffiths & Chittenden, 2006). The AS Neill Summerhill Trust has now been set up to raise funds for assisted places.

## **8 In Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

In investigating the regulation of organic food production, the thesis has considered how organic is regulated or self-regulated through the certification bodies. Not only that, the analysis has moved down to a micro level to examine self-regulation by individuals in their efforts to promote their own versions of organic. Hence, the outcome has been to study not only organic farming practices, but also the practices that are used by individuals to formulate their organic subjectivities and to put forward their own viewpoints during debates on organic.

The intention of the thesis was to find out how organic food production is regulated. In doing so, the study opened out this little word “organic” that has become so big and popular of late. The body of research presented here therefore provides no conclusions, but instead a number of research findings that can be explored by further research.

### **Applying Foucault**

#### **Findings**

My understanding of Foucault is that a code-oriented and an ethics-oriented morality do not operate independently. Whether one is responding to codified rules such as those drawn up by the Soil Association, or making up one’s own mind what to do about organic as an ethical subject, Foucault says that an ethics-oriented morality is employed in both cases. It was evident from the research study that, when there are no rules to follow, an ethics-oriented morality has more autonomy.



Notably, even without rules to follow, the code-oriented morality of the Soil Association was found to provide an ever absent presence that conflicted with individual ethical subjectivities at the community studied in the thesis.

Subjectivisations and accompanying objectivisations on how to be the good farmer were found to be very different, as might be expected, for non-organic and organic methods of food production. Non-organic prioritises efficiency and organic priorities integrity. Organic farming might be considered to be a more ethical way of farming. Nevertheless, it was evident that some organic farms are run as agribusinesses and are regarded by some smaller producers as compromising the ethics of organic food production. All farmers who sell organic produce commercially have to follow the rules of a certifying body, but the rules can be bent.

### **Implications for Future Research**

I would recommend attempting to apply Foucault's work, which has plenty of potential for taking one out of the rut of current ways of thinking. I suggest making use of texts written by Foucault other than *Discipline and Punish*, for: "*Foucault's later work opens up new spaces and challenges for discussion about organization*" (Starkey and McKinlay, 1988:238). One way forward is an emerging area of analysis that uses Foucault's concept of subjectivisation-objectivisation interplay that underpins the practices permeating Foucault's texts. In his later work, subjectivisation-objectivisation interplay involves the active individual in a two-way process of constructing and maintaining truth through care of the self practices. Moreover, self-regulation embodies responding to externally made rules and making ethical decisions when there are no obvious rules for, even without rules, the individual constructs internal rules that s/he revises continually. This would permit professional training and work experience to be viewed as a two-way

process upon which the individual performs ethical work upon her/himself to make ethical decisions in specific cases, rather than just following rules, as suggested by Anderson-Gough for accounting professional training (2005).

## **Agriculture and the Organic Farming Sector**

### **Findings**

During the last 60 years in UK agriculture, non-organic farmers have subjectivised their selves to a discourse of efficiency and, simultaneously, objectivised themselves through striving to achieve increased yields aided by mechanisation and applications of artificial fertiliser and pesticides. During the production of the thesis, organic food production in the UK has escalated. Organic runs counter to this discourse of efficiency by reintroducing a perspective focused more on the environment, animal welfare, and human health.

Organic farming is sometimes thought to have started up as a reaction to the intensification of agriculture achieved since WW2. Evidently, organic farming has been practised for millennia without being referred to as organic farming and still is today in many parts of the world. The early organic pioneers, who were concerned that Western agriculture might be compromising the integrity of the soil, visited Asian countries to investigate practices used to maintain soil fertility. A further early interest was in exploring the link between food and health. An early book on organic farming was found to have been published in 1911 although that type of farming was not referred to as organic until the early 1940s.

Standards for organic farming practices, with the added dimension of spirituality, have existed since the 1920s through Demeter under the guise of biodynamic

farming. Demeter remains still a global certification body for biodynamic farming today. The UK's largest and most well-known certification body, the Soil Association, produced a draft set of standards in 1967. It did not become compulsory to acquire organic certification prior to selling food produce as organic in the UK until 1993 with the implementation of EU legislation. From that point on, it was illegal to sell organic food produce without going through the required conversion period under inspection and acquiring organic certification. Nevertheless, rather than having this requirement imposed upon them, it seemed that organic producers have been proactive in achieving this legislation which helps them to distinguish their produce in the market-place from food produced by a farmer that has not achieved certification. Today, some organic producers continue to take an active part in maintaining organic standards.

It was decided that farming organically without some degree of ethical commitment to organic would be challenging for small organic farmers, due to the inevitable losses that occur and the hard physical labour involved. Clearly, small family farmers feel that larger businesses are squeezing them out. Organic farmers who are engaged in agribusiness, that is large-scale industrialised organic farming, are more likely to benefit financially from farming organically due to the benefits of economies of scale. It was conjectured that those engaged in organic agribusiness are able to comply with the organic certification body rules without necessarily having an ethical commitment to organic farming. Evidently, for instance, some organic agribusinesses abuse the concept of crop rotation without breaking the rules by borrowing another organic farmer's land for twelve months. Clearly, though, organic means many different things to different people and a practice such as this might not present itself as unethical to all organic producers.



Despite the findings of the Competition Commission and the subsequent setting up of a Supermarket Code of Practice, farmers are subject to intense regulation by the multiple retailers. Termination of a supply contract can have disastrous consequences for small farms in particular. Increasingly, organic farmers are opting for alternative supply routes including box schemes, independent organic shops, and farmers markets. They are also forming cooperatives to provide the organic consumer with a greater selection of produce.

At the level of retail marketing, organic appears as a simple word associated with a consistent set of farming practices. However, at the level of production, organic emerges as a multi-faceted word for, as well as having a fairly stable core which is non-use of pesticides, organic can be a signifier for additional truths that vary for different individuals and thereby becomes a key term in prompting debate around practices. Also, it cannot be assumed that the organic producer is an organic consumer.

During the production of this thesis, I learnt to appreciate the breadth of self-regulation that farming both organically and non-organically entail both through Foucault's code-oriented morality, which is responding to rules, and ethics-oriented morality, which is responding to an ethics of the self. In our unknowingness, we often perceive those who live and work in the countryside to be simple and unsophisticated. Farming, both organically and non-organically, has its own complexities and requires a lot of organising which, on small farms, is carried out generally by one person. With agribusiness, this is not so much the case because of the division of labour and bureaucratised routine that enable economies of scale.

Farming is perceived as a very physical job that places huge demands on the body. Clearly, farming also challenges the mind. Farming is a business with all the

requirements of any other business such as budget control and so on. Farming, both organically and non-organically, requires responding to numerous regulations such as those for waste management and animal passports. In small farming businesses, these tasks are often carried out by one person after long hours of hard physical work. A farmer has health and safety responsibilities for not harming other road users, and to visitors and family living on the farm in a potentially hazardous context. In addition, the farming day has to be planned according to certain regulatory constraints such as the weather and what other help is available.

### **Implications for Future Research**

The agriculture sector is under-researched in business schools. To recommend all the potential ways in which this research gap could be addressed is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Focusing on organic food production, future research could be directed towards current policy making, standard setting and implementation, and the certification process in the UK. To date, organic farming research in the UK has been directed largely towards studying the emergence of organic farming through history. Organic standards elsewhere have been studied and at least one comparative study has been made (Lynggaard, 2001). At present, it would be difficult to compare organic standard-setting and implementation in the UK with another nation, because a body of research does not yet exist on this subject for the UK. It is suggested therefore that further research could probe decision-making on standard-setting in the UK. By gaining access to meetings such as those of standards committees, the researcher would be able to study the power relations embodied in standards-making and policy-making at grassroots level, as recommended by Foucault.

Differences were found in the organic-ness of the UK certification bodies. Correspondingly, it would be interesting to compare the standard-setting processes of the Soil Association, which is positioned at the top of the hierarchy, and OF&G, which maintains only the minimum EU standards.

A further option is to carry out an in-depth research study of ACOS, which is the regulating body for organic certification bodies. Interesting issues coming up in a recent ACOS Meeting include concerns that certification bodies were approving new organic inspectors who were not yet ready for approval and a tendency to send the same inspector to the same farm year on year (ACOS, 2007).

With Foucault in mind, the organic conversion process for a farmer who has farmed non-organically offers potential for research in terms of a change in mindset. Accordingly, the interplay of subjectivisation and objectivisation could be used for analysis. How does a farmer who is converting to organic and has been applying pesticides convert to a different mindset in which pesticides are considered to be bad practice? How does a farmer, who is converting for instrumental reasons such as economic decline in mainstream agriculture, become organic? How does an ethics of the self make this transition?

Another interesting research question to ask would be why do some commercial producers claim to be organic but do not go through the process of obtaining organic certification? Legally, such producers cannot sell their produce as organic. During the production of this thesis, I have met producers such as these at farmers markets. For both this study and the previous suggested study, and worthy of study in its own right, one could investigate the consumption practices of organic producers. One might suppose that one could research the organic-ness of different



organic producers by asking them what they eat and how they avoid chemical use in everyday living.

Finally, I outline two suggestions for comparative studies. The first of these is to compare the farming practices of a small family organic producer with those of a large-scale intensive organic producer. As discussed in Chapter 5, there is a body of theory referred to as the bifurcation argument that considers organic producers to have branched into two streams: large industrialised growers distributing through multiple retailers and small family farms selling directly through box schemes and so on. Following Foucault, it is believed that a comparative study at a localised level focusing on practices is the way forward in establishing how large and small organic farms organise organic farming. The second study would compare box schemes of various magnitudes: say a small organic cooperative that supplies locally, a larger cooperative (for example, Riverford Organics run by Guy Watson), and a multiple retailer. Both Sainsbury and Marks & Spencer have launched organic box schemes recently and it would be interesting to compare the supply chains involved with those of the cooperatives to examine the effects that economies of scale have on running an agricultural business. One foreseeable reason why consumers buy organic boxes is to avoid the supermarkets and to purchase food that is produced according to a certain ethics. During the production of this thesis, a concern with buying local as well as organic has become prominent, as has increasing worry about contributors to global warming. One could compare how production and distribution are organised with a particular focus on how far food has to travel.

## Emancipatory Potential of Alternative Organisational Forms

### Findings

A self-managing organic community, chosen as the main research site, presents an alternative organisational framework to that presented by the hierarchical command and control style organisations at which most people spend their working lives. Indeed, command and control is not restricted to work organisations for some communities, including Findhorn, appear to be run in similar fashion. Also, communities are in a sense work organisations too for work is carried out, albeit boundaries between work and home and work and play are not clearly defined. Nevertheless, to avoid a tyranny of structurelessness (Freeman, 1970), community work must be organised and requires coordination and management through collective self-regulation. Greenfields offers an alternative organisational form that permits individual and collective self-regulation and in which debate flourishes. Consensus, as a decision-making process, invites everyone to contribute within a context of equality. It was decided that it was up to individuals themselves through self-regulation to decide whether to hold back or push their views forward. It was found too that consensus decision-making favours the status quo, something that had not been mentioned by the theory.

Studying the regulation of organic at a headless organisation such as Greenfields required an analysis that leant towards self-regulation. Accordingly, Foucault's care of the self practices were used for analysis. *Parrhesia* is a way of speaking the truth from one's heart. From what residents said and from my own experiences, in work organisations one holds back from saying what one really thinks. There are other factors operating too in that decisions seem to have been made before a meeting is held. Greenfields presents an alternative in which residents are able to engage in

*parrhesia* and to regulate themselves as individuals in choosing when to do so. Even so, within a context of equality, opinions were still held on who had the most right to speak and who had less right to speak.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Foucault's analysis of care of the self can be used as a source of inspiration for the possibility of achieving both independent thinking and of pleasure in organising life. The thesis applied care of the self to a self-managing headless community. The challenge would be to apply care of the self to a hierarchical command and control style organisation and try to avoid leanings towards domination and exploitation that are prevalent in many studies.

Employment is often not a source of job satisfaction. High-fliers are reported as abandoning their careers in exchange for more satisfying work. The Observer reported recently that thousands of professionals in their mid-thirties were abandoning high-flying careers to begin training as school teachers (Harris & Curran, 2002). Work-related stress is a feature of everyday working life, particularly under the demands of flexible capitalism, which erodes away more rigid forms of bureaucracy and replaces the concept of a career with that of a job (Sennett, 1998:9). The outcome is a corrosion of character, which Sennett defines as:

"It is the ethical value we place on our own desires and on our relations to others ... Character is expressed by loyalty and mutual commitment, or through the pursuit of long-term goals, or by the practice of delayed gratification for the sake of a future end ... How do we decide what is of lasting value in ourselves in a society which is impatient, which focuses on the immediate moment?" (1998:10).



It is proposed therefore that more research should be directed towards alternative forms of organisation, including cooperatives, in an attempt to focus attention away from capitalism's "iron cage" (Weber, [1904]/1992). In the spirit of an editorial in *Organization*, we should write to challenge conventional wisdom and, in so doing, challenge others "to dare to do a better world for all" (Organization Editorial Team, 2003:2, emphasis in original).

Business school students are presented largely with academic material about mainstream work organisations. Similarly, they are targeted by such work organisations to start a career in the city or suchlike. By exposing students to radical organisation theory on alternative organisational forms, business schools would be presenting students with wider choices for their futures.

Another way forward would be to engage in the kind of reflexivity recommended by Foucault that leads us to trying to disseminate our work beyond academia. This is endorsed by Barratt:

"In this respect, we might read Foucault as guiding us towards a distinctive form of reflexivity in scholarly practice, whereby the scholar constantly seeks to find ways to connect with public debate, to ask him- or herself, in the course of enquiry, how can I make myself and my analyses heard in the public arena?" (2002:201)

Hence, I propose that not only should more research be directed towards alternative organisational forms but, additionally, that the research findings should be disseminated to members of such organisational forms in the pursuit of an iterative process.

## Contribution

Agriculture has been little studied in the past by business schools. Organic food production is a growing business sector and deserves recognition within management research. Since the doctoral research brings together the unusual combination of post-structuralism and agriculture within a business-school context, the research findings are expected to make an exciting contribution within Critical Management Studies rather than to mainstream management research.

The thesis contributes to a body of work that is developing theory inspired by Foucault. To date, very little has been followed up in formal academic publications on Foucault's theme of the construction of truth games through the subjectivisation-objectivisation interplay. Moreover, it is envisaged that the research will provide a working example of Foucault's theory and hence help to make Foucault more accessible to people inside and outside academia. Through empirical work, the thesis substantiates the theoretical claim made by Barratt (2003a:1077) of the emancipatory potential of Foucault's writings.

Furthermore, Foucault's interest in communities and monasticism has remained largely underground. Starkey and McKinlay, though, are quite clear that in Foucault's later work "*Foucault's concern has shifted from the normalization of populations to the choices that are possible in small groups ('elites') who band together to create their own modes of thinking and behaviour within their own communities*" (1998:236). When writing about technologies of the self, Foucault (1988a) acknowledges the work of Cassian, a monk who introduced Eastern monastic rules into the West at Marseilles, Provence, during the fifth century AD. Furthermore, in a late conversation with Paul Rabinow and Herbert Dreyfus, Foucault maintains that up until the seventeenth century, food was a greatly more

important issue than was sex: *“For instance, in the rules for monks, the problem was food, food, food”* (Foucault, 2000e:253).

As stated in the beginning, mainstream organisation theory focuses on work organisations and the worker-manager-director-shareholder paradigm. This thesis provides Organisation Studies-focused empirical analysis of ways of organising outside work organisations, an area in which there is little research to date. The thesis thereby contributes to an emerging research area within Critical Management Studies that investigates alternative organisational forms (see for example Land, 2004).

Outside the academic sector, the research findings have proved already to be of interest to communities, cooperatives, and groups interested in self-management and alternative organisational forms. Interest has been shown during the doctoral research by friends and colleagues. Since food is a fundamental necessity, the research appears to be accessible potentially to a great number of consumers, including school children.

“If a scholar’s attachment to his discipline is pictured as primarily dynastic – he carries on the work of his predecessors inside the field, whether the field is history or philology – then Foucault’s is antidynastic, not the continuation of a line from privileged origin to present consciousness.” (Said, [1977]/1997:290)

To some extent, the work presented in this thesis is antidynastic for, in merging agriculture and Organisation Studies, it does not carry on directly the work of others writing in the area of Organisation Studies. Correspondingly, during the doctoral study I encountered the challenge of locating the proposed research within existing academic literature and thereby producing a literature review. The next step is to publish the thesis through journal articles. Again, the challenge will be to situate the



research within existing theoretical and empirical research presented in the journals.

Finally, it is hoped that the research presented in this thesis will inspire others to join in and make contributions.

## **Limitations**

How does one freeze four years' worth of study and thought into a moment, the moment at which the final thesis is complete? As I think, I change my mind and find out new things. This problematic is thankfully supported by Foucault:

"I dreamt that a day would come when I would know in advance what I meant and would only have to say it. That was a reflection of my old age. I imagined I had finally reached the age when one only has to reel out what's in one's head. It was both a form of presumption and an abandonment of restraint. Yet to work is to undertake to think something other than what one has thought before." (Foucault, [1984d]/1996)

Inevitably, therefore, the PhD thesis does not represent a totality of my thinking on the regulation and self-regulation of organic. Neither is the thesis representative of my thoughts at any one particular time.

There are gaps in the research. I missed the visit to Greenfields by the OAS advisor and have no idea whether the points s/he raised were in line with the minimum EU organic standards or with the higher standards of the Soil Association. In total, I interviewed only half the adults at Greenfields, although I did interact with some of the others through fieldwork. Additionally, I never did find out how the cooperative was organised in terms of shares and monthly financial contributions. The thesis

does not consider the wider world of life at Greenfields outside farming. Gaining access to study other aspects of community life would have been problematic as people are quite sensitive about some of the issues that come up related to living together as a community. It was fortunate for me that I had chosen farming as the main focus of study.

Also, since England only is under the jurisdiction of DEFRA, a substantial part of the macro-level research is limited to England rather than the UK.

## **Reflections on Doctoral Research**

### **My Own Organic Subjectivity**

I feel that I should not finish without declaring my personal organic subjectivity which must impinge on the questions I asked during interviews and the sense I made of my experiences at Greenfields.

How did I, the researcher, become “organic”? This question was posed to me at an academic conference by a researcher. I recalled my visits to an organic shop in the local market town of Hopmarket and the discussions with the shop owner that inspired me to carry out this doctoral research. The researcher probed further: Why did I used to visit an organic shop? I had to go back further until I traced the beginnings of my subjectivity to organic to consultations with a Nutritionist/Allergy Therapist who diagnosed chronic yeast infestation of the gut. I had become intolerant to many different foods and eating these foods was overloading an already compromised immune system. Over the weeks, as particular foods such as potatoes and tomatoes were reintroduced, the therapist recommended I try and eat organic versions of these foods.

Throughout the research period, my partner and I have tended to buy organic increasingly. We purchase little processed food and cook using mostly first-hand ingredients that do not include meat.

### **The Organic Researcher**

In this section, I show how as a novice researcher I evolved a style of investigational purity that subsequently evoked the label “organic researcher”. At some point during the doctoral research, it occurred to me that, quite coincidentally, in studying organic, I was evolving into an organic researcher. For, whilst carrying out data collection, I was doing things naturally and following my intuitions, rather than acting according to a prescribed manner, except to be natural as prescribed by Coffey (1999). Following Coffey, I had decided to avoid engaging in impression management in presenting my self, although in doing so I have to acknowledge that I was endeavouring to present myself as “my self” and inevitably left some sort of impression.

In *Counterfeit Money*, Derrida ([1991]/1992) discusses the impossibility of gift-giving, for the recipient always feels obliged to reciprocate, resulting in an exchange or transaction rather than a one-way gift. During the empirical process, the feeling that I was taking something and not able to give something back preoccupied me. I decided at some point that my gift in return for giving me their time, making me welcome, and feeding me with real coffee and home-made cakes, would be to provide every interviewee with a transcript of the interview, so that they too had a record of our illuminating conversations. At a second interview, one community member provided the following feedback from the first interview transcript:



And that's what I have fears with. If people come here and try to pull us apart and look for conflict and stuff which isn't there. You've reported as we are. When that thing came back ... it was all there. What I said was all there.

Another contribution I made was to design the research questions so as to challenge people to think, although not everyone took me up on this. Four separate responses to the question "How do you think the session went?" were particularly rewarding:

It's opened it up, really. It makes you think a bit, doesn't it.

It was lovely. It was very chatty. It was really nice. I liked the questions because I found them quite open and chewy. I'm not sure whether when you go back over the tape you'll feel that I answered the questions sufficiently ... But these are good questions because they let you chew on lots of things.

It's quite interesting to have to think about those questions again because it's thinking about – how we're doing is quite important to me, yeah? Particularly as I'm the only one left of those who started it all up. It's fairly important to me that this place succeeds. And so reviewing it in that kind of way is quite an attractive activity anyway.

It's also interesting in that it's married in with our current concerns about whether to – I don't know if it's accidental, but the fact that we are now reconsidering Soil Association membership.

I also helped by suggesting that Greenfields contact the Organic Advisory Service to obtain a free half day advisory visit. The community subsequently followed this up. The Organic Advisory Service visitor toured the farm with the Farm Chair and identified the practices that would have to be changed in order to obtain an organic

licence from an organic certification body. The visit provoked a lot of subsequent thinking out loud about these practices that would have to be changed. Greenfields residents often brought the practices up in conversation and they were also discussed at a Farm meeting.

During interviews, the potential for a certain power imbalance in which the researcher is capable of manipulating the interviewee also bothered me. As Barratt says:

“Transcending the expert paradigm requires a reflexivity in relation to one's perspective and value positions, a willingness to engage with the practical concerns of social actors and a preparedness to address one's readership on non-hierarchical terms.” (Barratt, 2003b:198)

Wray-Bliss says too that researchers are perfectly capable of weaving Foucault's ethics into their work whilst at the same time divorcing themselves from those who they research in a positivist way:

“This divorce risks ending in an unequal settlement whereby the professional academic accrues cultural capital and resources and the researched are left poorer as a result of their engagement with the ‘political’ academic.” (2002:18)

In critique of the Manchester school of Labour Process Theory in particular, Wray-Bliss goes on to say:

“They do not use this Foucauldian ethical commitment to reflect upon their own dualistic and problematic research and scholarly practices, but routinely separate themselves from those they study through reproducing the depersonalized conventions of a realist representation. In their empirical accounts, the research object/subject (the worker) is rendered visible/vulnerable in the text while the

researcher remains separate and aloof. The researcher and researched are constructed as independent, rather than interdependent, with the researcher revealing and commenting upon, rather than co-constructing and contributing to, the lives of the researched." (2002:22-3)

Unwittingly, I found that I talked about myself during interviews, so that interviewees would begin to know something of me also. One could argue that was a ploy on my part to gain the trust of residents and therefore procure good data. However, I think that I was looking more to respect community members for the privilege of opening up themselves to me.

Another thing I did was arrange to circulate my Critical Management Studies (CMS) conference paper at Greenfields (Skinner, 2005). At the time, it was purely theoretical. A Greenfields resident told me s/he, together with her/his partner, had each read the paper twice and commented that the theoretical framework was well thought out. In a way, s/he became involved in my research in a way that the others at Greenfield did not, effectively taking on the role of "third supervisor". S/he was a part-time university academic but has since retired. S/he said it was a strange feeling to be at the other end of the research process, that is to be the subject of research. A strange thing seemed to be happening that I hadn't heard of before. Not only was I becoming involved in the lives of the community residents, but they were also becoming involved in my life, like a two-way ethnography.

In Autumn 2005, I forwarded to Greenfields a photocopied extract from Burns & Stalker (1961) who identify the differences between organic and mechanistic systems of organising. In an accompanying letter, I explained about unexpectedly finding out from the data that the community is an organic organisation in terms of organising. At the time, a key contact told my partner that it was very nice to get



something back as usually they did not. Some months after data collection ended, the community member acting as “third supervisor” provided feedback at a social event at the community. S/he said that the members had talked about me and had said that I was spontaneous and did not appear to have an agenda. They were pleased to receive some feedback too. Apparently, the Burns & Stalker extract had provoked a lot of discussion because community members were, coincidentally, at the time considering whether to make things more formal or mechanistic by for example making the Coordinator role more formalised and limited to a certain period. Another Greenfields resident I chatted to seemed very pleased that the community was sufficiently organic for Burns & Stalker, if not for the Soil Association, commenting that it was good to know “*we’re doing something right*”.

## Appendix 1 - English Certification Bodies and Label Codes

EU code	English Certifying Body
UK2	OF&G
UK4	OFF
UK5	Soil Association
UK6	BDAA
UK15	Ascisco Ltd <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ascisco is a subsidiary company of the Soil Association that offers national organic programme (NOP) certification for exports to the US.

## **Appendix 2 - Certification Body Fees**

This appendix provides information about the producer fees charged by two different certifying bodies.

### **Soil Association**

During 2006-7, new converts to the Soil Association pay an initial application fee costing £199+VAT for the first six months. Then, for the next two years, they pay an annual fee of £325+VAT (if aged under 30 yrs), £398+VAT (if farming in a Less Favoured Area (LFA) or SDA ) or £425+VAT.

From then on, the Soil Association charges a sliding scale of annual fees for inspection and certification, subject to an annual increase, that currently ranges from £425+VAT for farms less than 10 ha up to £695+VAT for farms over 500 ha, unless the farm is in an LFA or SDA in which case the annual fee is £398+VAT for farms less than 100 ha and £418+VAT for farms more than 100 ha.

### **OF&G**

From 1<sup>st</sup> May 2006, OF&G charges an initial application fee for 10 months from start of conversion in the form of a sliding scale ranging from £350+VAT for farms up to 10 ha up to £730+VAT for farms over 500 ha, unless the farm is in an LFA or SDA in which case the initial application fee is £350+VAT for farms less than 10 ha and £387+VAT for farms more than 10 ha.

From then on, OF&G charges a sliding scale of annual fees for inspection and certification, subject to an annual increase, that currently ranges from £420+VAT for farms up to 10 ha to £875+VAT for farms over 500 ha, unless the farm is in an LFA



or SDA in which case the annual fee is £420 for farms less than 10 ha and £465 for farms more than 10 ha.

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